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NEHAL THE MUSICIAN
AND OTHER TALES

NEHAL THE MUSICIAN AND OTHER TALES

BY
SNEHALATA SEN

"For while the wheel of Birth and Death turns round
Past things and thoughts and buried lives come back."

—EDWIN ARNOLD



S. GANESAN
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1923

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
THE LOVING MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER
BEHARI LAL GUPTA. I.C.S . C.S.I

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

AS a short story writer, Mrs. Snehalata Sen, has long ranked high among Indian authors. Three of the stories in this book appeared originally in Bengali in a book named "Yugalanjali" as early as 1906. Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt, I.C.S., in the course of a review of the above book, wrote in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* (Madras) in January, 1907, as follows :

"Wild, weird stories in Bengali, melodious and powerful verses in English—such are the contents of this book written by the sisters, the talented daughters of the Hon'ble B. L. Gupta, now Judge of the High Court at Calcutta. Mrs. Snehalata Sen, the elder sister, gives free scope to her imagination in composing stirring little tales in Bengali . . . Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, the gifted poet of Bengal, has prefaced the book with a letter to the young authoresses. . . . 'Mrs. Snehalata's tales have always something wild and supernatural in them'".

"The most powerful among them is in our judgment, the story of 'Nehal, the Musician'.

... We rise from the perusal of the tales, impressed with her power of imagination and her skill of narration."

'Nehal, the Musician,' has since appeared in 1911 in English, in *The Idler*, a story magazine published in England. The rest of the stories were originally written in English and appeared in different magazines in India.

It is to be hoped that this volume will be of interest to the Indian reading public.

The Publisher's thanks are due to the well-known artist, Babu Nandalal Bose, for the suggestive cover design to this book.

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NEHAL THE MUSICIAN AND OTHER TALES

I. NEHAL THE MUSICIAN

DEATH had claimed my wife and only child, and at the age of thirty-five I became homeless and a wanderer on the earth. In my Esraj (a musical instrument), my sole companion and friend, I found solace and peace. One evening, as I sat and played upon its strings, by the river Jumna, a shadow fell between the setting sun and myself. I raised my head, and saw the tall form of an old Sikh standing very near me. He was noble and distinguished in appearance, and there was a strange look in his eyes, which were fixed on my Esraj. He stood silent and motionless. I rose wondering, but with a muttered exclamation he turned at once and walked away.

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Curious to know more of this strange man, I followed him and asked :

“Sikhji, does my music annoy you that you go away so abruptly ?”

“Stranger !” he replied with evident feeling, “your music is wonderful ! I have not heard such for years. I care not to hear, nor touch, nor even look upon an Esraj ; I avoid its music as I would the serpent ; but your melody has opened the barred gates of memory to-day.”

“May I ask your name ?”

“I am called Nehal the Musician.”

I was surprised and silent. The name of Nehal the Musician was known throughout India from Cashmere to Cape Comorin. But it was years since he had disappeared, and it was said he had become a hermit. After a pause, I said :

“Who has not heard of Nehal the Musician ? But why should strains of music vex the great musician ?”

“Sir, your Esraj has brought along with its music the memory of the past. It has flooded my heart ; it has borne away the present and the past is present with me now. Be seated, sir, and I shall tell you a strange tale.”

He pointed to a group of large stones which lay in the pathway. I obeyed silently. Nehal the Musician seated himself beside me, and with a dreamy look in his dark eyes, fixed on the waters of the silent, flowing Jumna, he told me this tale :

“In my youth I was one of the Court Musicians of the Palace of Maharajah Ranjit Singh of the Punjab. The old king was dead, and Rani Chand Kuar occupied the throne. Our band of musicians, with Janaki at its head, were given quarters attached to the palace, and there we all lived. There was rebellion and secret discontent in the land, but the dwellers in the Palace thought of naught but pleasure. From morn till noon, from noon to midnight, it was one stretch of feasting and gaiety. The courtyards were thronged with minstrels, magicians and dancing girls. Singing, dancing, music and theatrical performances went on all day and half the night.

“Thus day passed after day. Then came the Spring Festival. How shall I describe it? The Palace was transformed into a fairy land; trees were ablaze with light, the waters of

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fountains sparkled like gems, and garlands of flowers of all colours scented the air and hung everywhere. The tinkling of the anklets of fair dancers kept time with music; and the Esraj, the Sittar, and the Vina mingled in harmony. Wild rumours of disturbances reached us now and then, but we heeded not, and for four nights the festival was celebrated with great joy. On the fifth night a soldier galloped into the outer courtyard, and brought word that the old soldiers of Maharajah Ranjit had entered the town and were looting all round. Instantly the alarm was given, but before we could escape, the Sikh soldiers had surrounded the Palace.

“There was an uninhabited wing of the Palace not far from our quarters. The rooms were said to be haunted, for strange music and sounds were heard from them at night. The Sikh soldiers poured into every part of the Palace, but avoided the haunted quarters, and I speedily made my way towards them. I passed into the verandah along which ran a row of small rooms. Beyond was the outer wall of the garden. I made up my mind to break open the doors of one of the rooms and

escape by the window into the garden. As I walked down the long passage I noticed the word 'Rijia' carved on an arch over the door of one of the rooms. A strange attraction drew me towards it. I pushed open the door and entered. The room was small and the dust of years lay thick on the floor. A small carved sandalwood bedstead with a red and gold embroidered covering stood in one corner and an inlaid ebony stool by its side. On some wooden pegs hung women's garments, and scarfs of blue, red, cream, almond and pink, such as dancing women wear. On the wall were a few pictures exquisitely painted on ivory, and there was a small Persian carpet on the floor. Opposite the bed hung a large mirror of foreign make, and by its side, on a rusty nail, there was an Esraj and its bow, white with dust.

"The instant my eyes fell on the instrument they remained transfixed, I knew not why. I felt a strange thrill within me as I stood gazing on it. It seemed to me as if the Esraj trembled, and then a soft sigh reached me which seemed to whisper: 'Take me, take me.' Bewildered, I looked around but there

was no one in the room. Again the sighing whisper reached my ears. Like one in a dream, I took the Esraj down from the wall. Just then I heard footsteps, and prepared to jump out of the window. Hardly had I reached it when some Sikh soldiers entered by the door like a gust of wind. I jumped out into the garden, and was soon on the highway. Men and women were hurrying on all sides, but in half-an-hour I had left all the noise and crowd behind. Towards evening I stopped to rest under a large banyan tree.

“Then I looked once more at the Esraj in my hands. It was a beautiful instrument, delicately carved. I blew the dust away and turned it over, when I discerned some letters carved into the wood on the handle. Looking closer, I saw, to my surprise, the words ‘Rijia Captive’. Wondering what these words meant, I took up the bow and idly drew it on the strings, when a strange thing happened. An unknown melody issued from it. My hands moved, but I had no control over them. It seemed as if some magic power was moving them. The notes rose and fell in a mournful cadence which gradually broke out into a weird

wail of passionate entreaty—so wild that the Esraj seemed to tremble and sob. Waves of strange music filled the air till at last I dropped the instrument in fear. It fell from my hands on to the thick soft grass with a sound as of a sigh. A feeling of compassion, as if the instrument was human, came into my heart.

“At nightfall I reached my village home. My father welcomed me, and gave me to eat and drink, for I was motherless. We sat talking of many things and of the day’s events far into the night. I had hung the Esraj and bow on the wall of my room. As I entered I felt the same thrill within me. Something again drew me towards it, and I seemed to hear the whispered words: ‘Take, take me.’

“I had entered weary and footsore, eager to fling myself on the bed, but I could not resist that strange whispered entreaty. As in a dream I took the Esraj and drew the bow across its strings. My hands moved swiftly under its magic power, I know not how long, but I felt a hand on my shoulder. My father stood beside me. In a voice trembling with emotion he said: ‘Nehal, thy playing is

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worldrous—thy talent is great. I have not heard such music before. But, son, the night is almost spent, and thou must get thee to bed.’ In silence I rose, and hung up the instrument, flung myself on the rope bedstead, and in an instant was fast asleep.

“This was the first of many such nights. Every night, as I entered my room, the same attraction drew me towards the Esraj on the wall, and I sat and played on it for hours, almost unconscious. Waves of strange music, and notes of wild entreaty, came from it, till it broke into a low wail of pain and died away into silence. My days became an eager longing for the night; I cared for naught but this hour of unearthly music and mystery. I became as one possessed. What mysterious power was in the instrument? What meant those words ‘Rijia Captive’? What was the magic charm which enthralled me? ”

“One day my father asked me why I thus spent half the night in music. I replied that it was one of my court habits. ‘But my son,’ he replied, ‘thou art pale and thy cheeks are hollow.’ ‘Father,’ I asked, ‘what is Rijia? who is Rijia?’

“ ‘ Rija ! I wonder to hear that name from thee, my son, for thou wert a babe then, Nehal. Rija was the name of a dancing girl—a stranger from a distant land.’ ”

“ ‘ Is there any story about her ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, there is one. In the youth of Maharajah Ranjit Singh there came to his court a conjurer of great fame. He was known to the public as Peshora the Magician. He brought with him a slave, a young dancing girl of great beauty and attraction. But she was not only beautiful, but modest and virtuous. The men of the Maharajah’s court, young and old, were all enamoured of this lovely slave girl. There was a great Rajput chief who was exceedingly eager to possess her, and tried to persuade the Magician to sell her, but in vain. Whispers went round the Palace of this young Rajput loitering at midnight in the Palace garden, or strolling in the light of the moon under her window. One day suddenly Rija disappeared, and the Rajput was found dead, with his throat cut, in the Palace grounds. A few days later the Magician Peshora departed from Lahore, and the slave girl was never seen or heard of again. Since then, strange sounds

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of music and of weeping were heard from Rijia's little room until at last that part of the Palace was deserted. This is the story of Rijia.'

"A few days after, I left home and started with a few belongings for Agra to practise as a musician. I was welcomed cordially by a rich merchant and a great friend of my father. My fame as a musician soon spread all over Agra and Northern India, and nobles and princes, nabobs and Maharajahs, the great and the rich, sought me, commanded me, invited me. I became rich. But my heart was restless. I was bewitched, body and soul, by the magic Esraj. The passionate entreaty of the melody tore at my heart strings, the notes of pain pierced my very soul, and a wild longing arose within me to respond to the prayer. Sometimes the music ceased, with a smothered cry of agony, almost human. One night there issued from the instrument a shrill cry like that of a wounded bird. And the people of Agra whispered among themselves that Nehal the Musician was a wizard!

"My old father was dead, and I gradually retired from the work of my profession. But the Esraj still held me in bondage. Three

years had passed since I came to Agra. I was no longer seen, no longer famous. I sought lonely places, and spent my nights in the mysterious music and my days in restless craving.

“One night I wandered along the banks of the Jumna. The whole earth was flooded in the silvery light of the full moon. The river flowed with a gentle murmur. I stood with the Esraj in my hands, and a flood of thoughts crowded into my fevered brain. How long was I to be under its mysterious spell? What was the import of the passionate prayer? Would I ever be able to respond to it? Thus I mused as I was walking along the river shore, alone, almost in a dream. I had not slept for nights, and my legs were feeble.

“Suddenly I stumbled on a stone, and fell heavily on my face. My right arm, which I stretched out, struck against a rock and broke. I have not used it since, as I used it before. The musician's vocation was gone. His instrument gone too—the Esraj was broken into fragments!

“A soft, deep sigh was heard above, and I looked up. Ah! the sight haunts me yet. The beautiful and almost transparent form and

face of a woman was floating on the golden waves of the moon's rays. The large, dark eyes had a soft, sad expression in them, and the face—how shall I describe its exquisite charm, its great beauty? It was a momentary vision. As I gazed at it, the face faded away slowly into the soft moonlight. A great peace stole over me, my heart was at rest. I was free. A small piece of folded parchment among the fragments of the broken instrument attracted my eyes. I picked it up, and, opening out the folds, read these words: 'Rijia, thus art thou punished for thy sin.' This is my tale."

"Little do I comprehend the magic of which thou hast told me, Sikhji," I said at last, "or—of the Captive Rijia who was released."

"It is a magic which is sometimes seen on earth," he replied, thoughtfully. "The soul which is enchained by earthly passions will sometimes struggle and soar to the skies by the power of music."

Nehal the Musician had disappeared. I rose as from a dream; the dew of the night was heavy on my clothes, and the moonbeams slept in silence on the rippling waters of the Jumna.

II. THE SNAKE CHARMER'S TALE

I SAT in my little verandah facing the sea. The sun was setting behind the dark blue waves beyond the sands. It was a lonely place on the Orissa coast eight miles from the town of Balasore. A few small Bungalows belonging to Christian Missionaries were on one side and a small fishing village at the other end. On one side of the sand hills on which my Bungalow was, lay an expanse of sands, and beyond it the sea ; on the other side, as far as the eye saw, stretched far away into the distance low marshy jungles. Against the sky further were outlined the blue Nilgiri hills. The scene was peaceful and beautiful, full of light and colour—one of the solitary places of India where one is surprised to find habitation.

I turned my eyes away from the tide flowing out and the few fishermen scattered about on the sands towards the land. A dreary darkness

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was, settling on the wood, and the stillness and want of a breath of breeze made it more lonely than ever. Large bunches of red berries, soft white flowers and beautiful creepers and plants could be seen, and among the spaces little pools of water and narrow paths. It all looked like an overgrown neglected garden. Leopards, deer, porcupines and other small beasts were known to live in these jungles. I sat trying to imagine a leopard coming out from one of the bushes or a deer standing by the water, when I heard the sound of music—the music of a flute playing a weird tune, which I knew at once to be that of a snake charmer. Just at that moment I saw the man coming up the path leading to my Bungalow. I watched him and noticed he was tall and fair, and that an old woman, tall and fair too, followed him. As they came close it needed not a second glance to tell me they were mother and son. They both made a low ‘Salaam’. The man, or rather lad—for he seemed not more than twenty—asked in respectful tones :

“Will the Sahib be pleased to see the snakes play?”

I had seen it many a time before, but it always had a peculiar fascination for me and each time left me wondering at this strange performance. I assented.

Putting down his baskets he sat by them, and, taking out his flute, began to play. The snakes came out one by one, twined round his body, his head and face, and glided all over him.

There were black, grey and brown ones. He looked round, then said :

“Why, my White Moon, where art thou hiding? Come, come, my beloved, my beauty, and show thyself to the Sahib.”

He began to play more wildly and more earnestly. There was a strange mysterious power in the strain and held one spell-bound, and I wondered not at its magical effect on the serpents. Who had taught the Indian snake charmer such weird music, such wonderful notes? The music became wilder and wilder. At last a big white snake came out slowly from one of the baskets—a snake of a pure spotless creamy colour with velvet skin and large eyes which shone like stars. I had never seen a white snake and such a marvelously beautiful one. I gazed at it and the

play of the other snakes, as one bewitched. After a while, I said :

“Snake-man, thy snakes seem almost human, and their eyes have the look of a human being in them.”

“Perhaps, Sahib, there are human souls enchained in these bodies,” he said calmly, taking out the flute from his mouth to speak. “Our souls, as thou knowest, are imprisoned on this earth in all shapes till they attain ‘mukti’.” I stared and wondered at such talk from a common snake charmer, forgetting then that to all Hindus this creed was common.

“That is thy creed,” I replied, “but we believe that animals have no souls.”

“And what proves it, Sahib?” he said. “But thy creeds are strange and contrary. A Sahib once told me that man’s origin had come from monkeys—and yet animals have no souls thou sayest.”

I remained silent and gazed once more in admiration at the white snake which had lifted its large white head, its brilliant eyes shining like gems.

“What a beautiful and uncommon serpent this is,” I exclaimed.

"So it is, and I have seen only one other of its kind. I can tell thee a tale, Sahib, a true one as God knows, which will shatter all thy creeds to fragments."

"Of a snake?"

"Yes, Sahib, and I will tell it thee now if thou carest to hear," he said slowly as he put by, one by one, each snake into the basket and covered them up. I told him I should like to hear the tale.

"Perhaps, mother, thou couldst tell it better," he said after a moment's silence, turning to the old woman.

"Yes, son, if such be thy wish; thou wert only a child then," she replied in low musical tones. I looked at her and noted the regular features, fair skin, graceful figure and poise of the head. She was a true type of the Indian Aryan one sees in the North-West Provinces of India.

"Then tell it, mother," the snake charmer said. The woman arranged the folds of her dark red Saree on her shapely head in which white hair glistened, and folding her hands on her lap she began her tale in the high flown musical Hindi of the Northwest:

“My husband had three wives. He was a snake charmer too—they had been snake charmers from many generations. His first wife was a girl of his own village and wed when they were children. She was the mistress of his house, and like a mother in her care of him. He respected and feared her and loved her too. They had no children. When he grew up to be a young man he left his home one day, weary of the little village, and went abroad. For five years he was not heard of and his wife awaited his return in silent patience. Then he returned one day just before the Pujah Festivals with a beautiful girl, his second wife. She was a stranger from a distant land but of the same caste. Ah, she was beautiful—lovely as the moon and withal gentle and good. How my husband loved her, worshipped her. She was the love of his youth. His first wife murmured not, meddled not, content to see her lord happy, as it behoves all devoted and faithful wives to be. She cooked and did all the household work, nursed them, quiet and patient, and thus two years passed peacefully. But he longed for a son, and when no child was born, for the third time,

he wed me. Within two years a son was born to me who was the beloved of all. I however lived at my father's house, as my mother liked not that I should go and live with the two other wives.

"Soon after the birth of my son, the second wife, the beautiful stranger, died of cholera. The terrible disease had visited our village and carried off many. My husband mourned her long. After this I came to live in his home.

"Since her death my husband had given up the play of snakes, but he loved to play on his flute and would sit outside in the evening, breaking the stillness with its weird music. Then a strange thing happened. A beautiful white snake, such as you saw just now, Sahib, would glide out from the bushes near our tank and lie quiet and motionless in front of the hut, its head raised slightly and bright eyes fixed as if spell-bound. Every evening this happened, and we wondered.

"One day my husband rose and walked towards it, but with a swift movement it turned and disappeared into the jungle close by. This it always did at the approach of anyone, and at

last we molested it not and let it glide about around our home or lie about, like a tame animal.

“Ten years passed quietly and happily. When my son was eleven years of age, my husband, who had been ailing long and got fever, fell into a delirium and died. After his death his first wife shed no tears but sat still and silent a long while. Then she came to me and said :

“Sister, I go to join my lord and will perform ‘Sahamaran’. To-morrow the pyre will be prepared and I shall enter the flames too. And now, mark my words, sister ; when they bind me to the logs and the flames spring up, a large white snake will come and, gliding up to the pyre, lay itself on the other side of the body of him who is now no more. Kill it not, disturb it not. It is Hira, his second wife, the beautiful stranger. In a dream the truth and future has been revealed to me.

“I listened and marvelled then, but, Sahib, it was no lie. The next morning the funeral pyre was ready. A great crowd from far and near had gathered to witness the Sati. For it

is told in our Shastras that so great is its sanctity, so mighty its power that the sins of a lifetime are cleansed of those who witness this holy deed. It was a rare sight in those days too. The wife wedded to him in childhood robed herself in her best robe of red silk, and put on the few jewels she had, and marking her forehead with vermilion she mounted the pyre like a bride."

The woman paused, and, turning to the young man by her side, said, "And now, son, my tale is told, for I witnessed not my sister-wife's holy death. Thou wert present, and the little of the tale left to be told would be better narrated by thee."

"Thou art right, mother," replied the snake charmer, "and I shall finish the tale."

"Well, Sahib, the next morning the pyre was ready and in the presence of all the people my step-mother was placed on the pyre beside her husband—the companion of her childhood, her youth and her old age. A deep silence prevailed, and as the flames rose up a great white beautiful snake glided near the pyre and began to mount it slowly. A shout of 'A snake, a snake, *maro, maro*' was heard on all sides.

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I rushed forward as mother had bidden me and cried out :

“ ‘Hold, hold, it is my step-mother, the beautiful stranger, the second wife who died. Molest it not, men, for it goes to join her lord on the pyre.’ ”

“A sudden silence fell on the crowd at this as the serpent slowly reached the top and lay at the foot of the dead body of my father, coiled up, motionless.

“The Brahmin priest who performed the last rites asked in low tones, ‘What means this, son?’ ‘I know not, Maharaj,’ I replied. ‘My step-mother on the pyre foretold it and I have done as I was bidden.’ The flames crackled up among the logs and leaped up high. I shuddered and hid my face, for I was but a child and was led away from the spot.

“Sahib, the tale is told and it is a true one, for both mother and I have seen this strange thing happen.”

I sat in silence awhile. A sudden gust of cold wind came blowing over the sea and I saw that a storm was rising. I rose and gave the snake charmer some money and bid him spend the night with my servants, for it was

dark. Often since, this strange tale has come to me and left me wondering. Could it be true? Why not? The mystery of Death will ever remain a deep mystery to me ; for,

“ Of the myriads who

Before us passed the door of Darkness
through

Not one returns to tell us of the Road

Which to discover we must travel too.”

III. THE DEATH OF THE PICTURE

I HAD roamed the wide world over in search of Art treasures. From all countries I had gathered together pictures rare and old, strange and wonderful. At last I came to India, the land of wonder and mystery, the land of an Art that was lost and hidden away, a strange and unknown country. I was told that Art was nowhere to be had in this land, and pictures, crude, grotesque, and inartistic, were shown to me as the only things artistic to be seen or had here. But with the zeal of the collector, I sought the land from North to South, East to West. Nor was I wholly disappointed, for paintings, miniatures, stones and bronzes, and carved ivories, speaking of a once great art, beautiful, strange, and fantastic, were added to my collection.

After many wanderings, I came to B——, a little village station not far from the Sevalik

hills near Saharanpore. There I learnt of an old Fakir who lived among the hills in a cave and who was supposed to be mad because his dwelling was full of wonderful pictures, which some said were bewitched and mysterious.

After my mid-day meal I set out on horseback, with a guide, to the Fakir's dwelling. After many turnings between the low ranges of little hills, we came to an open place among them. It was a lonely place far from the road, and there, in one of the hills, was the cave. A massive arched doorway had been fashioned out of the rock and strange figures and shapes carved on it. As we approached, a figure seated on the threshold stood up. An old man, straight and tall, with a white beard, fine regular features, fair complexion, and dark bright eyes, clothed in the ochre robes of a Fakir, confronted us. As I came up, I salaamed. He returned the salute and stood silent. I addressed him in broken Urdu which I had picked up during my five years stay in India. "I have come to see your pictures, Babaji, which are wonderful I hear." His eyes brightened, and he answered, "Thou art welcome, Sahib." He led me into the cave

while my guide waited outside. It was a large room with several entrances, had many pillars within, and the roof inside was high. The light came full into it. A charpoy was on one side, and a few brass utensils in a corner. A little basket with a cover was under the bed. I saw that the walls were covered with many pictures, large and small. "Perhaps the Sahib is an artist?" "Yes", I replied, "I aspire to be an artist, but our Art is different from yours."

I gazed around with interest, examining the pictures on the wall, and was soon rapt in looking at them. Some of the paintings, which seemed to be very ancient, were beautiful in colouring, still fresh and bright ; some, wonderful in execution and marvellously faithful in detail, displayed delicate strokes of the brush. Often the beauty of form was lost in the expression of some thought which shone forth with great vividness. Wonderful pictures of Buddha's life, of Hindu gods and mythology, and of Moghul times, and other strange things hung around. All breathed the spirit, the history and religion, of this dream-land, and the Art and Learning of a time when the rest of the

world was still barbarous. I wondered where her lost treasures were hidden—ah, where? Her children could not reply nor her conquerors. Only Fate echoed back my question—Where? Some indeed still seemed to exist in this cave of the old Fakir, unknown to the world. Suddenly my eyes fell on a large picture, set high above the others, opposite the doorway where the light of the setting sun fell full upon it. It was the face of a woman—a beautiful woman with stony eyes, and a dead heart. The eyes were half closed and the pupils had a glazed look in them; a death-like pallor was on the face; a peaceful look on brow and features; and the lips bloodless. The hair, each of which seemed to be separately drawn, fell on both sides in soft waves, parted in the middle over the white brow; and a wondrous loveliness and charm was on the face. But, alas, it was the loveliness of death.

“So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
We start for soul is wanting there!”

The frame was of polished ivory inlaid with gold. I stood gazing in rapt wonder at the mystical beauty of the face, and the death-like colouring. It stood out vividly against the dark

walks. A hand was laid on my shoulder, and I turned to see the Fakir standing by. He said, "Sahib, dost wonder at this picture? It has a tale, and if thou carest to hear, I shall tell it thee."

As he spoke, the lingering rays of light faded away, and the picture looked spectral in its white frame in the gathering gloom of the cave. He spoke again: "Take down the picture, Sahib, for thy arms are strong and mine do tremble. Bring it here so that the fading light may fall on it, and, looking at it, I may be able to tell my tale better."

I complied with his request, and, taking down the picture, turned it over. A panel of pure white ivory, on which some writing in Indian characters was closely engraved, was fitted tightly over the back of the frame. The old man had spread a rich piece of Persian carpet near the doorway on which he sat down, and pointed to a little stool near him on which I seated myself. He took the picture from me, and, leaning it against the panel of the open door before him, began his tale:

"When I was young like thee, I was an artist at the Court of Delhi. But I not only

painted; I also collected pictures and other works of art. I travelled a great deal, and from all parts of the land I collected them. At last I came to the country beyond the Vindhya hills, and there I heard of the ruins of a beautiful old palace. It had belonged to a noble family of royal blood, then poor and almost extinct. I went one evening to see it. It was a beautiful structure even in its ruin. I passed through its halls and corridors, its chambers and balconies, and wondered at the beauty of the carved arches, the delicate tracery on the pillars and the beautiful latticed windows, the fine turrets and the domes. At last I came to a little courtyard, in the centre of which stood a small Hindu temple of pure white marble—a beautiful work of art, standing intact in the midst of the surrounding ruins. I entered and saw it was empty. While gazing up at its windows and arches inside, my eyes fell suddenly on a square white object hung high up in a niche, and almost hidden by a jutting cornice. Wondering what it could be, I got together some large stones and standing on them managed to take it down. I blew away the dust and turned it over, for it was the back

of a picture frame. A thrill went through me. Looking at me from it was the face of a woman. Ah, how shall I describe its loveliness, the sad yearning expression of the eyes? The flesh tints were so natural that it almost seemed alive. The hair, dark as mid-night, parted in the centre, fell in soft waves, framing the lovely face and the delicate rosy cheeks. The soft red lips seemed to move. It was all so life-like that I stood spell-bound. As I gazed at it, the expression in the eyes seemed to change, and the sad look disappeared. A look of hope seemed to come into it, and the eyes shone with a new beauty. My heart beat wildly with joy or fear, I knew not which. Surely the soul of a living woman looked forth from those lotus eyes. I was strangely moved. At last I returned home at dusk with the picture. I gazed at it in solitude, and would spend hours weaving romances round it. It became my companion. I loved to watch the varying expression of the face. Thou mayst wonder, Sahib, but the picture was like a human being. Sometimes the eyes were dimmed by sorrow and despair, sometimes bright with love and hope, or dark with sad pleading. At night, I

kept it on a table by my bedside resting on a silken cushion. A new power seemed to have entered into me too and I seemed inspired, for from that time my paintings were beautiful and such as I had never done before. But I was restless. I knew nought of the mysterious power of the picture, and often longed to be rid of it. Some months passed thus. The fame of my art spread far and wide. One day I was called by a great Prince. I was received in a large marble verandah. I had taken my paintings and also the picture. After I had displayed all my wares, I took out the picture and held it before the Prince. At the sight of it, he gazed with fixed eyes as if bewitched, and then started up. 'What means this? It is the Princess Maya's face! Whence came this? Who painted it?'

"I replied, 'I know not Maharaj, I found it in a ruined palace in the country beyond the Vindhya hills.'

"He stood silent, gazing at it, and then a dark angry look came into his eyes. 'It is my wife's picture, and it cannot remain with a stranger to be exposed to strange eyes. Give it to me.'

32 NEHAL THE MUSICIAN AND OTHER TALES

"I replied quietly. 'No, Maharaj, I cannot give it thee. It is mine, and I will not part with it.'

"I know not why I replied thus, for I had often longed to be rid of its mysterious spell. He answered not, but turning from me called to an attendant, and said in stern tones, 'Go, bid the Princess Maya come here.' The man departed, and the Prince stood as if rooted to the spot, gazing at the picture silently.

"Soon the tinkling of bracelets and anklets, and the rustle of silks were heard, and a lady, tall and graceful, robed in a sky blue silk cloth brodered in gold, her face veiled in a light blue gauze scarf, entered by a side door. She came with slow gentle steps and stood by the side of the Prince. He turned to her and said in low tones: 'Lift up thy veil, Princess.' She obeyed silently, and as the face was revealed, I fixed my eyes on it, for it was the face of the picture.

"My eyes seemed rivetted on the beautiful face, the living embodiment of the mysterious picture which had come into my possession, and had lived with me all through these months. 'Dost know this man, Maya?' the Prince said.

“Her eyes had been bent on the ground. She raised them for an instant to look on my face. ‘No, my Lord,’ came the reply in soft musical tones, like the vibrations of a Vina, and, as she spoke, a blush mantled her cheeks, for like all Indian ladies she was unused to strange men.

“The Prince, who had his eyes fixed on her face, suddenly turned on her with a quick movement. The madness of jealousy was on him, and a terrible passion of mingled love and hate, shone forth from his eyes. He shook her fiercely by the shoulders and muttered, ‘Thou liest. Woman, speak, who is he?’

“A look of surprise followed by terror came into her beautiful eyes as she gazed into the Prince’s face. Then large tears filled them and rolled down her now pale cheeks. In trembling accents, she replied again, ‘I speak the truth, my Lord.’ But the Prince drew his dagger, and in an instant had plunged it into her heart. With a groan she fell to the floor. Then he turned towards me, and like a mad man, made a thrust at me with the dagger so quickly, piercing my shoulder, that I reeled back. My eyes suddenly fell on the picture which had

fallen from my hands to the floor. The Prince had lifted his hand for a second thrust, but I cried out, 'Hold, Maharaj, hold and look,' and pointed to the picture. He looked at it and stood as if one dazed. And well he might ; for a strange thing had happened. The picture which was so life-like, which breathed of love and hope at times, of sorrow and despair at others, which was human in its ever-changing expression, had suddenly changed. The blood slowly left its cheeks ; a world of dying thoughts lit up the large dark eyes ; a convulsive spasm passed over the lovely features ; and then slowly and softly it died ! Yes, *died* ! For it was Death surely which had set its seal on the face. The features gradually became rigid, the eyes glassy, and the lips bloodless. But withal it was still beautiful with a new cold, deadly beauty, such, Sahib, as you see here ! ”

The old fakir paused awhile, then continued :

“ A look of horror and dread came into the Prince's eyes. He turned to me and said in a voice full of fear. ‘ What witchery is this ? ’ ‘ I know not, Maharaj,’ I replied. ‘ I am no wizard, but mayhap the picture will tell its own tale, for there is writing behind it in some

foreign language. You are learned, Maharaj, and may be able to read it.'

"I picked it up, and, turning it over, handed it to the Prince. He scanned the writing and said in tones of wonder, 'Yes, it is a foreign language, but one I know.' 'Then, for Heaven's sake, read it and explain, Maharaj,' I cried. The Prince read it silently first, and wonder and fear came into his face. He turned to me, and rendering it into Urdu, read it out to me. This is what was inscribed on the ivory panel at the back of the frame :

THE PORTRAIT OF PRINCESS EILA, OF THE ROYAL HOUSE OF CHITRAPUR

I have painted Thy Cheeks with my Life's Blood, I have filled thy Eyes with the Love, Hope, and Sorrow of my Heart, and touched thy Brow and Lips with them. I have woven my Thoughts of thee in the Dusk of thy Hair, Eila, Queen of my Heart! And when thy Spirit leaves thy Body, it will be enchained here to this Picture, drawn with my Life's Blood, and my Heart's Love and Sorrow, Hope and Despair. Thus it will remain till

one of thy race will shed Her Life's Blood
and her Heart's Tears for thee.

MIRAN THE PAINTER

"There was deep silence for a while, then the Prince cried out, 'The Princess Maya is of the Royal House of Chitrapur! Then the picture fell from his hands, and he flung himself in an agony of grief by the side of his wife whom he had killed.

"An hour passed, the sobs of the Prince breaking the silence. At last I rose, and collecting my pictures, departed from the palace with slow and feeble steps, for my arm was bleeding profusely. This is the tale of the picture, Sahib."

I had listened with wonder and interest to his tale, and, after a short silence, said, "Can thoughts and feelings be enchained and put into a picture, Babaji?" "Yes, Sahib. The true artist puts the thoughts of his heart and the reflection of his soul into his picture, so that it lives even after he dies. If it can live, can it not die?—if the artist so will it!" I was silent, for this was strange logic indeed! "But, Sahib," he added, "the power of the

Artist is gone from the land, and Art is a lost treasure to Hindustan ! ”

I felt the truth of his words. The sun had set and the evening was deepening into the coming night. I rose and bade him farewell, and rode away out of the dark blue Sevalik hills pictured against the dark sky.

IV. SATI—AN OLD STORY RE-TOLD ¹

A GREAT Yajna or Sacrifice was being held at the abode of the holy sage Brigu.² The Gods and Sages and vast constellation of Stars and Planets had all assembled there. The Sun-God by day and the Moon-God by night awaited at the gate and received the celestial guests as they arrived.

All had come but the proud Daksha,³ the eldest son of Brahma, the creator. At last he came and as he entered the Hall of Sacrifice,

¹ The story has been adapted from Babu Dinesh Chandra Sen's Bengali little book "Sati" and from the old legend which Bengal poets have put into verse.

² Bhṛigu, one of the ten primeval Sages.

³ The legend of Daksha's Sacrifice belongs to the Paurāṇik Period, which succeeded Buddhism and when image worship began. Sati was reborn again as Uma and wedded again to Siva. It was from the self immolation of Sati that the custom of "Sati" or burning of widows arose.

all the Gods rose and greeted him. Three of the Gods alone—the three of the Trinity remained seated. They were his father Brahma, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. But Shiva was his son-in-law. Burning with wrath the haughty Daksha turned to Shiva and said, “Dost thou dare to look down upon me? Thou hast been given a place among the Gods only because thou hast wedded my daughter Sati. Who would receive thee, thou roamer of unholy places, thou wearer of snakes and bones, thou of unknown rank?”

That absent-minded moon-crested God to whom insult and favour were alike, who cared naught for rank and fame, wealth and power, turned his great calm eyes in silence on Daksha for a moment. There was peace and forgiveness in the look. But the proud Daksha mistook it for scorn and indifference, and resolved to humiliate his mighty son-in-law.

Soon after this, Daksha made preparations for a great Sacrifice and proclaimed that all the Gods except Shiva should attend.

The Universe heard with awe and dread that a Shiva-less Yajna would be performed; a

Yajña without the Presence of the Lord of the three worlds. Such a thing was unheard of. All awaited in fear to see who would first take part in it, but none dared. At last Daksha called Narad, the celestial minstrel, the messenger of the Gods, and said, "Go thou Narad, to all the Gods except Shiva, and say that Daksha himself will begin the Sacrifice, and all must attend." Smiling his celestial Vina, the great Musician brought forth the Music of the spheres. Waves of wondrous music filled the Universe. The wind bore it, and the rivers caught it as the notes passed into eternal space. He roamed over the vast Universe and invited all the Gods and sages.

At last he descended on the snowy peaks of the Himalayas and sought Shiva who dwelt there. With folded hands and with bended knees he said, "My Lord, thy pardon for attending a Yajna without thee." "

With a calm and holy smile the mighty God replied :

"The Universe suffers without the Sacrifice of the Gods—let the Yajna be performed. I care naught for it, Oh Saintly Narad, but let not my Sati know it—it will grieve her."

Having replied thus, Shiva was plunged again in meditation. Narad roamed over Kailasgiri, a Swarga¹ on earth. The last flash of the setting sun touched the matchless heights which rose erect and sublime. It was earth's grèatest Temple to the Almighty, its walls of eternal ice and its lofty summits ever lifted to Heaven. A breathless silence pervaded the realms of ice which gleamed with wondrous hues. At their foot were shadowy mists which deepened as they moved and hid from view a vast realm of wonder and beauty which lay below. Green hills bright with blossoming trees, huge dusky rocks with cool caverns from which bright creepers peeped and over which the cataract fell, lighting up dark abysses with its flash of silver waters breaking the stillness with their roar, stood side by side. The hill streams smiting the rocks in silver music went dancing and foaming along, murmuring through forests of stately Sal and Devadar and Bamboo groves, on to the pathless plain afar. Lakes jewelled with Lotus flowers, blossoms of the red Yava and Karni Kar, beauteous and gorgeous flowers bloomed on

¹ Swarga—Heaven.

hill and dale and lent their fragrance to the mountain breeze.

Above in the Temples of eternal ice, while the mighty God Shiva sat plunged in meditation, his consort Sati stood on a hill top under a Karni Kar flower tree. Like Sandhya (evening) tinged with the setting sun's last rays in the fading light, in silence stood the great Sannyasini. On her white hands and throat were black rosary beads. Her loosened tresses smeared with ashes were bound with a garland of Atashi flowers. Her slender body was clothed in the rough bark of trees, and the vermilion and sandal paste adorned the brow of the Goddess who stood and gazed up into the sky.

Suddenly a fiery Chariot came into view and sped across the sky. Studded with gems it looked like a meteor on its course. In it sat her sister Swaha in flame red robes coloured from the red lustre of a star. A chain of gems hung on her breast, and beside her sat the pale-faced Moon God—her husband. Another chariot flashed by—then another—thus hundreds of celestial cars swept along lighting up the evening sky.

From the lone hill-top Sati watched her sisters, friends of her childhood, dear and near kinsmen and women, speeding on. In wonder she turned to Narad who stood by her in reverent greeting. Returning his greeting she asked, "What means this procession, Saintly Narad?"

With bowed head and in low tones the minstrel replied :

"Thy father hath prepared a great Yajna, Oh Devi, and the Gods speed on to attend it. Thy Pardon Goddess, Oh, mother, pardon." There was no need to tell her more. Sati turned away her face. Smiting his Vina to sad chords of music Narad left the spot and rose above the mountain crests of Kailas.

For a moment Sati stood wrapt in the celestial music which echoed through her lovely realms and then she left the spot. As she moved, the trees showered their blossoms on her, and bending their branches laid their fruit at her feet in homage. New flowers bloomed at each step, and birds burst forth into song, but joyless was Kailaspuri to her. Sati sighed as she went, and in that instant a deep sigh swept through the forests, hill and

dale, the rivers changed their joyful music to a sad murmur, the red Yava flowers paled, the lotus drooped, the birds ceased to sing. Stepping to the icy heights she stood in silence before her Lord clothed in skins. The mighty Shiva, the blue-throated, moon-crested Lord, sat on a tiger skin with his lotus palms folded plunged in deep meditation. Snakes twined round his tresses, bones and rosary heads hung from his neck, and ashes besmeared his clotted locks.

Like unto Usha (the Dawn) approaching a cloud, with the vermilion of the newly risen sun on her brow, stood Sati in her radiant beauty before the great Yogi (ascetic).

In silence she made known her thoughts to him, for, perfect Love needs no words. Slowly the God opened his lustrous eyes and rose. Laying a loving hand on her shoulders, he said,

“Wouldst thou go to thy father’s abode, Sati?”

“Yea, if my Lord permit it.”

“Thy wish is mine, Devi, and I have not the heart to refuse thee—but thou goest uninvited, beloved.”

“What matters it, my Lord, a daughter needs no invitation. I go to my dear mother who yearns for me on this great day.”

“Go then, Devi, but our faithful Nandi shall attend thee.”¹

For an instant Shiva stood silent lost in anxious thought. The shadow of some evil unknown seemed to fall on him, but calming himself he seated himself once more in contemplation.

All was ready for the Great Sacrifice and Daksha's abode was bright with the assembled Gods and holy Sages. A secret nameless dread was on some, for, this was the first time a Sacrifice was performed without Shiva. In the inner apartments was Sati's mother surrounded by her daughters and others. All the great Beauties of Swarga and earth had assembled, but the beauty which contained the three worlds was not there. In sadness and silence Daksha's consort went from hall to hall. Suddenly the word was heard, “Sati

¹ There is another version of this incident. It says that Shiva would not give his permission, saying, “It is not befitting, thou must not go”; and Sati became wrathful, assumed a terrible form and threatened to destroy the whole Universe.

has come." She had come riding her favourite Lion which had darted like a comet through the blue sky with the Devi's tresses flowing behind. Clothed in the rough bark adorned with Yava flowers, holy beads, ashes and white sandal, the great Sannyasini entered. She had left her father's abode, a bride robed in rich and bright raiments adorned with radiant priceless jewels and gems. This was a new Sati indeed—a wondrous Sati surrounded by a halo and a calm majesty which outshone all heavenly and earthly beauty.

The mother clasped her daughter, and in that moment of joy all was forgotten—the mother's grief and shame, the daughter's wound.

Her lovely sisters, consorts of Gods bright and radiant in beautiful robes and celestial jewels, made from gems and bright meteors, gazed in wonder at her amazing appearance. Her sister Swaha said,

"What means this strange guise, sister, this mingling of vermilion and ashes and holy beads? The rough bark thy only raiment?"

Another said, "Why, sister Sati, if thou hadst only asked me, I would have gladly given thee more fitting robes and jewels. Look, my

Lord has brought me some rare gems from the Evening Star."

A flush crept over the Yogini's sweet face. She knew not what to say. Just then her aunt, the wife of a great holy sage, approached and said,

"Is this our dear Sati? Daughter, *Kuber*¹ is thy treasurer and yet thou comest adorned with a few wild mountain flowers, ashes and holy beads. But thy beauty contains the beauty of the three worlds, holy and pure, and needs no adornment."

Then Sati said to her sisters and others who surrounded her,

"Sister, I love these wild forest flowers better than bright jewels. These ashes and vermilion are all I care for. The vermilion proclaims my eternal wifehood, my love. These ashes tell me of deep truths that thou knowest not."

Then turning to her mother, she said: "Mother, I came to see thee. Let me depart now to Kailaspuri."

The news of Sati's coming had reached Daksha. His heart beat with love and joy for

¹ Kuber—The God of Wealth.

his favourite daughter, but the next instant the image of Shiva his son-in-law, adorned with snakes and skulls, and his calm look of indifference, rose before his mind, and bitter angry thoughts surged within him.

“So the unholy wild God has dared to send Sati alone. I shall show her my hate and scorn for Shiva,” he muttered.

He sent for Sati.

With slow and gentle steps the great Jogini entered the festive Hall, where Gods, sages and celestials were gathered.

The Homa Fire of the Sacrifice, which had refused to burn till now, flung up vivid flames at her approach. A spirit of sacred holiness filled the place and a holy peace fell on the assemblage. Bending low to the ground she saluted her father, but instead of returning her greeting, he broke out in wrathful tones,

“Dost thou not feel ashamed to come, in bark and beads and ashes like thy wild-looking consort, who, devoid of wealth and rank, wearer of snakes and bones, wanders in impure places? Alas, I have given thee into the hands of a savage, a companion of ghosts and demons and foul things. Wouldst thou

wert dead? Thou hast donned the garments of a widow—from this day forth think thou art a widow. Leave thy wild husband and come and live in thy father's abode—or never come here again!"

While listening to these insults thus cast on her beloved Lord, Sati lost her power of hearing. On seeing the enraged face of Daksha, her father, and the mocking exultant face of others, she lost her power of sight. The thought that she was of the same flesh and blood of one who reviled her Lord, burned within her. By the power of Yoga, in anger and pain she caused the blood in her heart to cease to flow, and she stood motionless. A flame shot up around her. For an instant the vivid brightness of the flames lit up the beauteous face and form with a glorious radiance. Then, like the last red rays of the evening, which, departing, leaves a splendour of crimson halo, the spirit of the great Yogini left her mortal body—which lay in its matchless loveliness on the ground with a halo of light around it. The spirit had flown from the body which death dared not touch nor spoil.

At that moment a sad and mournful chord swept over the peaks of Kailas and echoed through its lovely realms. It was the faithful Nandi," who, with wild cries of " Mother, Oh mother " rent the sky.

Shiva's meditation was broken. He knew all. His Sati lay lifeless. Like a sudden storm which surges over the calm sea, so rose Shiva, the mighty Lord, from his calm meditation—Shiva the Destroyer. His wrath fell on Daksha's Yajna. In an instant his furies and demons alighted and destroyed the great Sacrifice, Daksha and his followers. All was destruction around, except the spot where lifeless Sati lay like a pale star. Shiva came and took up the beloved form bereft of whom Kailaspuri was dark and joyless. The God forgot all, as he held the body over his shoulders. Over his tiger's skin lay nestling Sati's clothing of bark; her dark dresses bright with undying red yavas mingled with his matted locks. The light of Shiva's moon-crested brow shed a soft radiance on her face which lay like a sleeping flower. Lost in his grief, oblivious to everything, the great Yogi danced on.

Mountains, rocks and rivers, moved away from his path. Years rolled on. Still Mahadev wandered and danced on and on.

Such are the Gods!—great in wrath, in love, in grief, great in all things.

The Lord of the three worlds, heeded nothing, forgot all—for Sati had been the only tie which had bound the absent-minded God to the Universe.

The great Yogi was a Yogi no more. Gods and men watched and waited in fear and dread.

Then Vishnu the Preserver fearing evil, cut the body of Sati into fifty-one (51) fragments with his discus. The fragments fell over the blessed land of Bharata and on those sacred spots¹ rose temples. Suddenly Shiva felt that Sati's body was no more on his shoulders. With a start he ceased dancing. His eyes closed, he was a Yogi again lost in meditation!

¹ These sacred spots in India are called Lingas. They draw hundreds of pilgrims to them to this day. Some of them are Benares, Allahabad, Vaidyanath, Kalighat, etc.

V. UMA—AN OLD STORY RE-TOLD ¹

DRIVEN by the Asuras ² from their kingdom in Swarga, the homeless Gods went to Brahma the Creator and addressed him thus :

“O thou uncreated, thyself causeless, the cause of the universe, grant ‘unto us the power to conquer the usurping Asuras’.”

Brahma replied—“A son born of Shiva and Uma alone can lead ye back to heaven and victory.”

The Gods then sat in council and Indra summoned the Love-God and said, “O God of Love, we seek thy aid.” The Love-God smiling answered thus :

“I stand at thy bidding, O Indra ; rest thy thunderbolt awhile, for my flowery bow,

¹ Uma is “Sati” reborn.

² Demons or spirits who from time to time invaded the kingdom of the Gods.

mightier than the shaft of Death, doth conquer where even *thy* arms fail. Saint and sinner, nay, even the great Shiva owns my power." Indra answered :

" Then O all-conquering Love, we seek the very thing thou namest. Speed thy keen shaft on the mighty Shiva ; a son born of him and the mountain monarch, Himalaya's daughter, Uma, alone can conquer the Asuras and restore to us our kingdom."

" I go to do thy bidding, Indra, Lord of the Hosts." So saying the Love-God sought the snowy heights of the Himalaya, where Shiva on his bull roamed about with his followers, or sat erect and silent plunged in meditation. Uma, Himalaya's daughter, attended on Shiva at her father's bidding, for Shiva was an honoured guest in her father's domains.

More than mortal beauty had the destined bride of the immortal Shiva. The beauty of three worlds was in her person. Softer than the Sirisha blossoms were Uma's rounded arms. Slender and straight like the stalk of a lily was her graceful body. From her black hair, like midnight, her face shone forth, which was as a moon surrounded by black

clouds. Like pearls set in coral were her teeth and red lips, and the voice that issued from them was sweeter than the kokil's—softer than the southern wind. Her dark eyes were like the blue lotus and lustrous as an antelope's.

But the mighty Shiva whose thoughts were great, heeded not woman's beauty. Erect and stately in holy contemplation, he sat silent and motionless in a grove. Serpents twined round his matted locks; a necklace of bones and a rosary hung round his blue throat; a skin clothed his ash-besmeared body; and a bright radiance shone from the features of the three-eyed God.

The undaunted God of Love, ready with his bow and arrow, was filled with awe in Shiva's serene presence.

The flowery bow fell from his nerveless hands and he hid himself in a bush. But as Uma burst forth into sight in all her loveliness, his courage came back, and picking up his bow and arrow he awaited his time.

Like the full moon encircled by stars, Uma with her maidens entered the sacred grove to do homage to Shiva, the Lord of the world.

She bent in reverence, and as Shiva took the offering of flowers from her lotus hands and blessed the maiden, at that moment the Love-God sped his arrow straight and true.

As the vast and still ocean swells at the rise of the full moon, so the calm and mighty heart of Shiva, pierced by love's dart, heaved for an instant like a surging sea, at the sight of Uma's wondrous beauty. He cast a look of love on the mountain maid. She stood as in a trance, her brow and neck flushing at love's first dart, like the dawn at the touch of the young Sun-God. But with a god-like effort Shiva calmed his swelling heart, and casting his three eyes all around, he sought the cause of this sudden untoward emotion.

He soon espied the Love-God half hid in the bush, with bended knee and flowery bow. A great anger arose within him.

• The Gods in Heaven watching, cried out: "Spare him, O Lord." But ere the words reached the angry God through the realms of space Love lay lifeless in ashes, destroyed by Shiva's fiery glance.

Uma returned to her father's home, loving but unloved. She resolved to win by penance

and devotion what her beauty had failed to do. The gentle maiden cast aside her wreath of pearls, her rich robes of silk and gold, and covered her tender body with the barks of trees. Her lovely face, framed by her matted locks, looked like a lotus encircled by wild moss. On the bare rocks she slept, head pillowed on her rounded arms. She lighted the fire at the altar, gathered flowers and the sacred kusa grass, and sang hymns, worshipping and praying night and day. In summer she stood in the midst of blazing fires, drooping like a lotus at noon. In winter she stood in the ice-cold water, paler than the *kumud* which opes at dusk. Her fame spread far and wide, and all came wondering to see the gentle maiden's stern and holy penance. Joyless was Kailashpuri for their loved Princess. The flowers paled and drooped. The forest sighed. The rivers smote the rocks and changed their joyous silver music to a sad murmuring. The wind moaned o'er hill and dale and snowy peaks.

At last Shiva's heart was touched by her great devotion, though her beauty could not conquer him. Love's full tide flooded his

great heart. The Love-God, who had ere this been brought back to life, rejoiced. The homeless despairing Gods rejoiced. In the guise of a Brahmin youth, the Moon-crested God came to Uma's hermitage and addressed her thus :

“O maiden, born of the mountain, beauteous as the moon, fair as the lotus, what gift seekest thou thus in stern penance and unceasing prayer. Dost *thou* desire Heaven, whose father's domains are as beautiful as the realms of Swarga? Dost *thou*, whose beauty all would seek in vain all the world over, desire a bridegroom? Sighest thou maiden? What stern youth is there who is unmoved by thy sweet loveliness and devotion?”

Uma answered not, but blushing turned to her handmaiden who replied thus :

“Brahmin! Uma loves the mighty Shiva and seeks no other bridegroom but him. But the great God, who has slain the Love-God, is immoveable and unconquered. To win him the gentle Uma does penance and prayer.”

Then the Brahmin turned to Uma and spoke thus :

“Strip thy tender body of the rough bark and adorn thyself in silk, O Uma. Return to thy

fathér's halls, fair daughter of Himalaya ! Turn thy thoughts from Shiva, the stern and unholy God ! Homeless he wanders in impure places, among 'funeral pyres and reeking corpses. Snakes twine round him. Skins of wild animals are his clothing. Wild looking, devoid of wealth and rank, graceless and homeless, he knows naught of love. He is no bridegroom for thee, gentle Princess !

With quivering lips and flashing eyes thus the maiden replied :

“ Not knowing, O Brahmin, thou speakest thus. Know thou that Shiva, though poor, is the source of all riches. Homeless though he wanders, he is the Lord of the three worlds. His grace and beauty are indescribable, uncomparable, incomprehensible. That which men discard and love not, he loves and cherishes—yea, even snakes and bones ! He despises nothing. His love is infinite ! Unholy places are made holy by his presence. Though void of rank and wealth, he is the brightest of Gods. But great or small, he has won my heart, and him alone do I desire. Slander not, O Brahmin. Cease and depart.”

Thus saying, Uma turned away in anger from the stranger, every graceful limb quivering. But she was clasped in his arms. Turning her beautiful eyes full of wonder on him, she beheld her Lord. Like a rock-bound stream turned from its course, she stood still, blushing and trembling. Taking her lotus hands in his own, thus spoke Shiva in accents of love and tenderness: "Maiden, won by thy love and devotion, I am ever thine!"

VI. THE TALE OF THE BUDDHIST MONK

I HAD been commissioned by the Archæological Society to undertake the excavations of some ruins and temples recently discovered in the heart of a dense jungle on a mountain in Ceylon. There was no house or bungalow there and I took up my abode in the ruins of an old Buddhist stone abbey, which with tent cloths and derries made a fairly comfortable dwelling place. Some hundreds of coolies had been engaged in the work of digging, and they too slept at night in another part of the ruins.

Years ago some one had evidently begun excavating but had left off, and parts of the jungle had been partially cleared, and slabs of stone, stone images, etc., lay here and there. The place was studded with shrines and stupas, caves and temples, all dedicated to Buddha, the great Teacher of Humanity.

Wonderful architecture, beautiful sculpture and carvings met my eyes everywhere. Dark, gloomy, cool, subterranean caves, where no light penetrated, and lofty and stupendous structures rearing their temples to the blue sky were scattered all over the forest. Strange fantastic figures were sculptured on some, and the smaller shrines had beautiful carvings on them. Each day's work unearthed some stone image or figure of Buddha. In some of these, infinite labour had been given to every detail. While superintending the work I often wandered about, gazing at these specimens of a past art and musing on them. Neither Time nor the ruthless Invader had succeeded in effacing the indestructible works of the ancient Hindus which tell of power, glory, strength and beauty. From Man's work I turned to Nature's, and the deep forest shutting out all sight of anything modern enclosed me in a strange and new world which seemed to belong to another sphere.

As the shadows of evening deepened around me one day, and the coolies ceased their work and retired, an unnatural weird gloom seemed

to fall on the place. I stood leaning against the trunk of a tree. Dark, erect and severe stood the shrines and temples. In the fading light they looked spectral and I fancied I could almost see the shadowy forms of Buddhist monks moving about. It was the consecrated ground of a great religion whose spirit was choked and entombed by a false superstition, like the caves and temples themselves. At last I rose to leave the gloomy place, and as I turned a tall form confronted me. It was of a handsome man in the garb of a Buddhist monk, in loose ochre-coloured voluminous robes, with a bowl in his hand. The features were fine and regular and not of the Mongolian type one usually connects with this costume.

Was it a ghost of the dead wandering about among its former haunts? I started and gazed in silence and wonder at the apparition when he broke the stillness around and spoke in fluent correct English, "Does the Sahib wonder at the temples of the Master?"

"Who are you?" I asked. "A poor Buddhist monk who dwells in yonder little ruin by the river," said he, pointing to an edifice some distance away by which a little hill stream

flowed downwards noisily. It was a little ruin of no particular shape.

Strings of beads and strange charms, and pendants hung round his neck. As my eyes wandered over him they fell on a pair of rings on the hand which held the bowl. They were exactly alike except in size—one being smaller—and of peculiar design, with a great stone in the centre. A marvellous stone such as I have never seen before nor since! They seemed to be large brilliant diamonds with a bright spot of gold like a luminous spark in the centre of the stone. It glowed and flashed in the waning light like a point of fire! My eyes were rivetted on them, when the monk spoke again: "The rings are strange. They are the relics from a temple and their story is stranger still, Sahib." I took my eyes off the wonderful stones and said:

• "May it please the Holy Sir to tell me the tale. The stones are marvellous, such as I have never seen nor heard of." "If the Sahib will come to my cell and rest awhile, I shall be pleased to do so." I assented and we walked on silently, he leading the way, till we came to the little ruin by the river. The

moon was just rising—a pale young moon in whose silver light the river shimmered along in a long line. It was a hot sultry night. The monk entered his abode and brought me a stone cup filled with cool clear water which I drank. There was a raised stone slab outside near the entrance and he requested me to sit on it while he did so beside me. Then, resting his hand on the begging-bowl, the strange stones flashing in the moonlight—he began his tale.

“I was a Prince, Sahib—the Prince of Ratanpur.” I looked at him and wondered no more at the noble princely bearing of the man. He continued :

“A cousin of mine now sits on the Gadi and rules the land. A few years ago I was the lord of those territories, but the mystery of Life was revealed to me, and I was called away from my worldly life of pleasure and vanity.. I had been touring in Europe after five years of college training in England. I had just returned and intended to travel all over India before I went back to my State. I landed in Calcutta and from thence proceeded to Benares. I viewed the ancient city with a new interest

contrasting it with the scenes I had just left. After going about in the city for two days I took a large green boat courteously lent me by a friend. The Raja of——lived a few miles up the river and I proceeded thither. As my boat glided along I stood and gazed on the varied scene of the riverside. It was a quaint sight. The temples of Benares with its flights of steps, the hundreds of men and women, some bathing, some praying, some worshipping, all bathed in the rays of the morning sun and above them the towering temple, striking and unique. Here indeed I felt I was in the land of the Hindus—the land of Bharat with no touch of the West. The scene revealed even to the trivial observer the history of the past—for there among the numerous old temples in the sacred city of the Hindus a Moslem minaret lifted its brow to the blue sky. As my boat floated on slowly, it passed in front of the burning ghat, reminding me of Death in the midst of the Varied Life around—of Maya which is ever present to the Hindu. A dead body lay stretched on a litter, covered with a white shroud. Just then another boat glided in between ours and the riverside. An old

mañ, a Buddhist priest, stood in it looking at me. He was tall, clean-shaven and thin. He had a number of brass fancy things, evidently for sale, and a little covered basket in his hand. The boat came alongside of mine and the old man held out some of his things saying in a courteous voice :

“ ‘Will the Maharaj be pleased to see these ?’

“ ‘There were some quaint little figures, charms, amulets and pendants.

“ ‘I have bought many of these, Holy Sir, and care not for more,’ I replied.

“ ‘Then will the Prince be pleased to see these stones and rings,’ he said again, uncovering the little basket and taking out some rings set with various stones. I took them from him and as I looked at them a large brass ring set with a strange brilliant stone which looked like a diamond with a spark of yellow light in its centre attracted my sight. I had never before seen nor heard of such a stone. The ring was crude in its make.

“ ‘This is a strange ring with a wondrous stone in it,’ said I, pointing to it. We had left the burning ghat behind, but the dead body with its rigid outlines from under its covering

could be seen. The old priest turned his head in its direction and said in a dreamy tone :

“ ‘The mystery of Life and Death is in that ring, Maharaj. It is a relic from a Buddhist temple. The Mahatma, whose pupil I was, gave it to me when his soul was departing from its earthly house.’ ”

“ ‘If thou wilt part with it I would buy it,’ said I.

“ ‘I would not willingly do so, Prince,’ said he after a pause, but I have need of money. It is the great wish of my heart that I join the monks in the hermitage of Mansarohar in the Himalayas. If this ring could bring me the sum I need I may sell it.’

“ ‘And how much is that?’ I asked. ‘Two hundred rupees, Maharaja, neither more or less.’

“An irresistible desire came over me to possess this strange ring and I agreed to the price.

“As he handed it to me he said, ‘The ring is not of brass, sir, but of Ashtadhatu¹ and the stone a marvellous one. It is not a ring only thou hast bought Maharaja, but *dreams*
¹. A mixture of eight metals.

—dreams wonderful and strange and beautiful that will show thee glimpses of another world. There is one other only like it, and it lies hidden somewhere. Perhaps thy steps shall lead thee thither and to holier things, for the mystery of Life is in it. May the path be unfolded unto thee, the path that leads away from Maya. Farewell, Maharaja.' He signed to the boatman who pushed away and soon his boat was lost among the crowds behind.

"I held the ring in my hands and turned it round examining it carefully. How the spot of gold flashed like a luminous spark. The word 'Maya' was engraved inside in Sanskrit letters. It was a large ring of a man's size. I opened my cash box and put it by carefully. Our large luxurious boat glided along slowly. The glow of the setting sun on river and temples faded into the dusk and I went into my cabin for my evening meal. After my repast I sat out on the deck reclining lazily in a large armchair and smoking. We had left behind the crowded part of the river and the temples and houses. My boat had been anchored under the overhanging branches of a large tree for

the night. Gradually an overpowering drowsiness came over me and the sound of distant music as of a hymn or a chant reached my ears and then a strange thing happened. The river bank faded from my view and I saw a band of women, tall and graceful, robed in the garments of the order of the yellow robe, with veils over their heads, walk forth slowly. In the centre was the black-robed figure of a maiden with head uncovered and long tresses streaming over her back. Her hands were bound. The procession stopped and a Buddhist priest led forth the women and stood facing them.

"But all was lost in a moment in the shadows of the night. Slowly, the moon rose flooding river and bank, and in its golden rays the face of a woman appeared before my eyes—a piteous face with a frightened look in the eyes. Her long flowing hair seemed to envelop her in a black shroud.

"Maharaja, it is late, and the dews of the night are falling."

"I started. My old servant stood beside me. I rose and went to bed. Sleep came, bringing with it dreams, strange sights,

fragments of scenes to which there was no end. I awoke late next morning and wondered.

“But why should I? I had bought these dreams. I bought them with two hundred rupees. I had paid for the Ring. A strange land was this of ours where dreams of an unknown past could be had for money—could be had with a ring. Fresh from England and Europe, it seemed exceedingly strange to me even though I was an Indian. Night after night these dreams came to me. Dreams of Buddhist temples and caves, monasteries and shrines, nuns and monks—in strange unknown countries. I often took out the ring and gazed at it. It had a mysterious fascination for me. Thus three weeks passed, and after going to Agra, Delhi and other places I returned to Calcutta. The maiden in black robes continued to haunt my dreams. Sometimes she appeared in beautiful robes performing the daily tasks of a temple, lighting the evening lamps, decorating the altar. Sometimes as a bride she stood before me radiant and beautiful but always the same face. One night I seemed to stand in a vast hall upheld by massive stone pillars sculptured in strange

figures. On a raised dais sat an old woman in the yellow robe of the Order—stern, austere and silent. Lines of Buddhist nuns stood on each side and in the centre stood the black-robed maiden bound hand and foot with bent head. A young man—a Buddhist monk—entered the hall and, marvellous to relate, he had the face and figure of myself. He opened out a scroll of parchment and seemed to speak for some time. Slowly the stern looks of the old nun vanished and rising she came forward and unbound her who stood there. She turned her face for a moment to the young monk—and then all vanished.

“The dream was a very vivid one and I wondered more and more. One evening while looking over an album of old pictures at a friend’s house, what was my surprise to see a picture of the hall I had beheld in my dreams. The resemblance was unmistakeable and I resolved to go to that place. The writing under the picture said it was in a forest on a hill in Ceylon where excavations had been undertaken by the Ceylon Government. I turned to my friend and told him I meant to sail for Ceylon next week.

“‘Why, you passed it on your voyage and might easily have gone then,’ he remarked.

“It was true but I did not reply. The next week I sailed in a large sailing boat for Ceylon. An irresistible desire, an uncontrollable impulse seemed to have taken hold of me.

“In due time I arrived there and proceeded at once to my destined place.

“And, Sahib, it was to *this* place I came.”

The monk ceased for a moment and I looked once more at the two strange rings on his hand and at his dark, earnest, dreamy eyes. Was his tale true? The rings were real without doubt. He went on again :

“I entered the vast hall of my dreams. The building was a Buddhist monastery of stone partly in ruins. I wandered about in its cloisters and little convent cells. I wandered at the gorgeous mosaic ceiling, the massive arches and carved walls and niches of the temple adjoining it. All was silent, dark and lone within. At eve I returned to my lodging in the house of a Singalese gentleman a few miles from there. But at night in my sleep it seemed that I rose and went out. Unknown though the place was, I found

myself walking along and ere long reached the ruins.

“ As I neared the abbey I stood still as if turned to stone, for a wondrous sight met my eyes. Shadowy forms moved about among the trees ; bells rang out in peals ; a procession came out bearing a dead body ; and then all vanished into the darkness, and I awoke to find myself in bed. Was it a dream ? I spent the next day in watching the coolies digging and in wandering about the ruins aimlessly. At eve I did not go home, for a strange fascination kept me, enchained, as it were, to the spot. As night closed around me, enshrouding the forest in a black darkness, a great restlessness overtook me and I roved about. Suddenly I found myself tracing my steps along a narrow path behind the abbey. I went on as if in a dream and entered a large enclosure in which was a number of tombs. Mechanically, as if directed by some invisible agent, I stopped at a tomb. The coolies had evidently been digging there, for a large oblong slab of stone, deep like a box, lay near some fresh earth, and the lid was open. A few bones—*human* bones—~~lay~~ outlined in it and, marvellous to relate, another

ring like the one I had bought in Benares lay in it. As I stopped and picked it up, a low chant reached my ears,

“I take my refuge in thy name and thee.

I take my refuge in thy Law of Good.

I take my refuge in thy order.

Om.’

“I gazed around with eager eyes, and there from the darkness above shone forth the face of the maiden in the black robes, the maiden of my dreams. A halo of light encircled her face pure and holy as an angel’s. It seemed to speak of holy things, to call me away somewhere, Where? As I gazed, it faded slowly into the dense darkness and the low sweet chant died away into deep silence.

“When I awoke daylight had pierced the dense gloom of the forest and touched the trees and cupola-shaped stupas, and the heights of the temples and shrines with a golden light. It fell on the ring in my hand which flashed forth into a hundred sparks. I rose with it in my hand and retraced my steps to my lodging.

As I walked a voice sighed with the wind,

“I take my refuge in thy name and thee.”

A voice murmured among the trees,
"I take my refuge in thy Law of good."
It formed the music of the hill stream,
"I take my refuge in thy order.

Om."

A voice echoed from the caves and mountains, "Om."

A face, sweet and pure, hovered round me.
A voice whispered in my ear,

"I take my refuge in thy name and thee."

"A great peace came over me. All longings and desires left me. The Path 'where healing streams quench all thirst,' 'where bloom immortal flowers' lay disclosed to me—the Path which leads away from Maya and the vanities of the world.

"Thus it was, Sahib, that I, the heir to an ancient line of Kings, have left my State and have entered the Path my Master trod. Om."

His tale was ended and I perceived my two servants at a distance waiting respectfully. I beckoned to them. They came but they had forgotten my presence. With holy reverence they prostrated themselves at the feet of this Buddhist Priest who murmured a blessing,

laying his hand, on which the strange stones sparked, on their heads.

It was late, I rose and bade the Buddhist Monk farewell.

·VII. DOCTOR RAGHUNATH

AFTER twenty-five years of service I had resigned my post and was going home. One evening as I sat arranging my old letters, suddenly I came across a newspaper cutting. I unfolded the paper, and as I glanced at the first few lines, the memory of a pale young face and a pair of startled dark eyes came to me. A face from the past which faded away into the dusk and left me wondering.

It was long ago. I had then just come into the village. A great cyclone had visited the land and left the mark of its cruel rage on all nature and things. I was a schoolmaster in a little village in Eastern Bengal. One evening as I sat in the verandah of my little thatched bungalow, I heard footsteps. A Bengali lad of about twenty years of age stood on the stone steps. He had on the usual loose tunic and cloth, and a scarf hanging from his shoulders. He was of small slight build with a boyish

face, out of which a pair of dark eyes looked at me with a startled expression. I rose and went to him. He said in a gentle weary tone : “ Sir, may I have a night’s lodging here ? I was hurt in the train during the cyclone while travelling home. I have been lying ill in the house of a gentleman since then, and have just left it to go home.”

I took him in and learnt he was a student in the Medical College at Calcutta. As he was a gentleman’s son and a student, I was glad to offer him my hospitality, and gave him a bed in my room. The boy was quiet and seemed thoughtful. That night I was suddenly roused from my sleep by a loud voice. The lad was sitting up in his bed and saying in an excited tone : “ Oh God ! what eyes, what a hungry horrible gap ! It wants to tear out my that heart. Where are the keys ? I *must* open the door of the room ! what is—” He ceased, and fell back in a swoon on his pillow. I threw water on his face. He opened his eyes once and then went off into a deep sleep. I wondered at his strange words.

The next evening, while resting in the verandah, I turned to the lad who was seated

silent at one end, and said, "You did not sleep well last night."

He looked at me quickly and said in a frightened voice:

"Why, sir, what did I do?"

"You sat up and said a great many things." The boy rose from his chair and began to pace the verandah. At last he stopped before me, and said in a strangely quiet voice:

"Sir, I must tell you all, or I shall go mad. Listen and I shall tell you a tale which will startle you, but do not think me mad. God knows I am speaking the truth." He sat down on a chair by my side, and said in a tone of command: "Listen well, sir, to my story."

He seemed to hold me with "his glittering eyes," and like the "wedding guest," I sat still and listened, "like a three years' child" to this tale:

"My name is Ranajit Kumar Gupta. A month ago, our college being closed, I started for Dacca which is my home. There were only two passengers in my compartment. One of them, an old gentleman, got down at the second station. I glanced at the remaining passenger. He was a tall fair man with good

features, a high forehead, and a thoughtful look in his dark eyes. His face was clean-shaven. He was dressed in a black suit—the coat being rather long. A large wooden box and a small bag seemed to be all his luggage. The words ‘Dr. Raghunath Roy’ were printed in large letters on the lid of his box.

“Soon a great storm arose. The train trembled and quivered, passing through fields, jungles, towns, and villages. A great cyclone had come and large trees and huts were uprooted and blown about. At last the train stopped in the middle of a field, for some of the carriages were smashed and broken. The sun had set and it was fast getting dark. We stood gazing in silence at this sudden fury of the skies when all at once I felt a stream of water on my head. A loud sound was heard, and I knew no more.

“When I awoke to consciousness I found myself lying down. I tried to sit up, but blood flowed from my head down my face. My head was bandaged. I sank back exhausted. My companion of the train, Dr. Raghunath Roy, was standing near me and said :

‘Do not attempt to get up. Your head is cut severely.’

‘Where am I?’ I asked.

‘On the platform of Kushtea Station: Our carriage was smashed, and we were in the wrecked train all night in a field. Another train brought all the passengers here this morning. A great cyclone has come and gone and many lives have been lost.’

“I looked around. The station was crowded; the groans of the injured and cries for those dead were heard on all sides. Raghunath had some bandages and medicine in his hand. He left my side and pushed into the crowd. I saw him attending to those suffering and hurt. For more than an hour, silently, he bandaged, washed, and tended their wounds, bringing relief to all. Then he returned to me and said in a kind voice :

‘I must go home by boat now. Can I do anything else for you?’

‘Yes, sir,’ I replied eagerly, ‘take me with you, for I am alone and too ill to go home now. I shall leave when I am better.’

“He remained silent a moment thinking, then said :

‘All right, come with me. You shall remain till you are well enough to travel home by yourself.’

“I was carried on a plank of wood to a large boat on the river, which was a few yards from the station. For three days and three nights we sailed on the broad Padma river, passing many villages and jute fields, and then we entered a narrow *khal* (canal). At last we anchored at the ghat of a small village. From there we got into a palanquin and reached our destination, a small white-washed house about three miles from the village. It was a lonely place, the only other inmates being an aged Brahmin cook and an old half-witted maid-servant. As I entered, I knew not why, a strange feeling of fear stole over me.

“After a week, thanks to the care of Dr. Raghunath, I was better and able to go about a little. There were three rooms and a verandah in the house. One of them was our bed-room. There was a large hall in the centre. The walls of this were lined with

large book cases filled with books, and in the centre was a table and two or three chairs. The third room, a small one, on one side of the house was always locked, and I was told it was the doctor's study.

"I saw very little of Raghunath. He used to go out for long walks morning and evening. After his mid-day meal he would enter his study, shut the door from inside, and remain in it till sunset. Sometimes in the mornings he would sit and read for hours in the library. He usually returned home from his evening walk after dark. He spoke little and went about his work silently. He seemed to forget my very existence sometimes. Now and then at meals he would exchange a few words with me. One day he asked: 'Have you heard from home?' 'No,' I replied. 'I have written and asked for money, but have got no reply yet.' He then for the first time asked me my name, where I lived, and what I was doing. I learnt too that he had been to Europe to study medicine. On his return he had lived with a Sannyasi for five years, in the study of some almost lost sciences of India and wonderful remedies. It was to try a difficult

experiment that he had taken this little house in this lonely place and had given himself up to his work. Soon after this conversation, another day, Raghunath said :

‘You must feel very lonely all day. As you are studying medicine, perhaps you would like to read the books in my library. You are welcome to use them.’

“I was glad to avail myself of the permission. I found the book-shelves full of priceless volumes in Sanskrit, Arabic and English, of Science and Medicine, both modern and ancient. I could read only Sanskrit and English. I took down some, and the days were no longer dull.

“One day I said to my host, ‘Sir, can I help you in any way in your work?’

“He looked at me in a startled suspicious way, and said abruptly :

‘No, thanks, my lad, there’s nothing you can do.’

“Two more weeks passed and yet no letter came from home. I began to weary of my exile here, for I was quite strong and had recovered from my injuries. A strange feeling of impending danger stole over me too. A

mystery seemed to be within the doctor's little closed room.

“At the village, in my walks, I learnt that Raghunath tended the sick as a labour of love and that he was respected by all. But no one knew anything more of him.

“Gradually a change seemed to come over this strange man. He became more silent and seemed always to be lost in some anxious thought. Sometimes he would pace up and down the verandah restlessly muttering to himself. I often found his eyes fixed on me with an intense look in them. Sometimes he would sit listless and idle for hours without entering even his little room.

“At last I became anxious and eager to leave this lonely place, and be rid of the company of this strange silent man. I looked forward daily to my letter and money from home.

• “One evening, as I sat in the verandah looking at the view of the village and river in the distance touched by the red glow of the setting sun, Raghunath returned from his walk earlier than usual. A small brown canvas bag was in his hand, and as he walked past me hurriedly, a horrible smell reached

me.' He took no notice of me, however, but entered his study and shut the door.

"I did not see him at supper that night. The next morning when I awoke it was raining heavily. By the evening the wind and rain grew worse, but Raghunath with a bag in his hand, went out as usual. A storm arose at night, and yet my host had not returned. I took my supper alone and went to bed, wondering where he could be in this awful weather. Early next morning the old cook roused me from my sleep, saying :

'Sir, Master returned home after midnight dripping wet. He was shivering and looked ill and is in bed now. Will you go and see him?'

"I rose at once and found my host lying on his bed in high fever, almost unconscious. Now and then he was muttering to himself. I nursed him all day. Towards evening he became very restless and lay with his eyes open. Suddenly he sat up and with a wild look said in a loud voice : 'All is ready, my work nearly done ! What cannot man do with the help of science ? India will be the better for it. It will be peopled with a new race of

strong men. Sin!—is it a sin to perfect science, to benefit mankind? All is ready. Only a heart is wanted.’

“He was silent for a while gazing wildly around and then continued :

‘A newly-uprooted heart,¹ warm and beating with life, to fill the gap ! Where shall I get it ? Why should I delay ? What is a boy’s life sacrificed to science ? Will all my efforts be fruitless for the want of one thing only ? Oh God, give me courage and strength ! A cyclone !’

“Raghunath ceased and fell back on his bed in a swoon. I listened in horror to his ravings. Slowly, the meaning of his strange words was borne on me, but my brain and mind refused to believe its awful meaning. At last I rose determined to find out the mystery in the doctor’s little room. I searched for the keys and found them in the pocket of the unconscious man. With quick steps and a wild fear at my heart I went to the room, and with trembling hands I turned the key of the

¹ It is a well-known fact in medical science that after death for some time the functions of the heart and some of the organs of the human body are still *active and alive*.

door. It was a small room with two small windows high up on the wall. The walls had shelves all round, and on them were a great many bottles, boxes, curious looking instruments, and some bones. A large table stood in the centre, and on it was a large oval tub covered with a white sheet. I knew in an instant that the secret of the doctor, the mystery of the room, would be revealed as soon as I lifted it. A horrible feeling came over me, and yet a strange attraction drew me towards the table. I lifted the sheet. Oh, God!——”

The boy covered his face with his hands, as if trying to shut out some dreadful sight. Then he lifted his head and continued :

“I stood horror-stricken, gazing at the sight which met my eyes. My heart seemed to stop beating, my blood froze within me! It will haunt me all my life. Floating in the tub in some yellow liquid, was the huge body of a naked man, nearly twelve feet in length. All the organs of the man’s body and limbs were perfect, even the blue veins could be seen. The eyes, a deep black, were staring up, void of expression. Only one thing was

wanting. A large gap gaped at me from the spot where the heart should have been. Like the hungry jaws of a demon, the empty place seemed to want something. I knew then, that as soon as its want would be supplied, this unnatural man would become alive. I gazed fascinated at this silent creature, lying staring up at me, neither dead nor alive, dumb, and without a heart. As my eyes remained fixed on its black vacant ones, it seemed to me that a cruel hungry look came into them. They seemed to say, 'Give me a heart and life, I have none.' It seemed as if the creature would spring up and tear out mine with its two huge hands. A cold shiver went through me. I closed my eyes and knew no more. When I opened them again I found myself on the ground, leaning against the wall. A gentle cool breeze was coming in through the door, and the morning had come. By degrees I remembered everything, and I rose and went out without looking back, and locked the door. Raghunath was still unconscious on the bed. I flung the key on to the floor, and left the house that instant. Soon I reached the village. The sun was high in the heavens, and

the 'green fields, the river, and village touched by its golden rays made a pretty picture. The peaceful scene seemed to say, 'It is only a dream, it cannot be true!' But from among the trees in the distance could be seen Dr. Raghunath Roy's little white house. I had a few annas with me, and crossed the river in a ferry boat, giving the boatman all I had. Since then I have been walking from village to village in search of lodging till I can get home."

The lad had ended his tale. His lips were parched, his face drawn and pale, and beads of sweat stood on his brow. I thought to myself, "This boy has weak nerves, and he should never have gone in for medical study and the dissecting of bodies," for I did not believe his story then. A week later money arrived from his home, and he left.

About a month after this, I came across the following paragraph in the Padma weekly:

"A LIVING HUMAN MONSTER.—A startling horrible tale comes to us from the little village of S——on the banks of one of the branches of the River Padma. We are told that a monster man, about twelve feet in height, appeared suddenly one morning in the village, and went

about killing men, women and cattle. He was quite nude. No one could say from where he came. He was first seen to issue from Dr. Raghunath Roy's house, three miles from the village, in a lonely place. After going about among the panic-stricken villagers, and roaming about in the jungle near by, the monster returned at night to the doctor's house. The next morning the creature was found dead by some wood-cutters in the jungle. From the appearance of the dead body, which was torn and mangled, it seemed as if he had been killed by some wild animal—probably a small tiger or leopard, which are often seen in these parts. It is difficult to believe that a living Rakshas appeared in these times, but nevertheless about thirty or forty villagers solemnly affirm the truth of this horrible tale. Doctor Raghunath Roy was subsequently found dead in his room. A huge stone was lying on his breast."

VIII. THE CURSE OF THE RAKHI

I STOOD by the river-side watching the bright-clad bathers. It was at the junction of Jamuna and Ganga. It was a strange meeting—this of the two rivers. A distinct line marked their joyful embrace and the mingling of the waters gleamed and glittered in the morning sun. Dark, silent Jamuna stood still, patiently awaiting the coming of her fair sister Ganga who came bounding from the snowy Himalayas, rushing along the plains of Bharat, flowing along its many cities. Having met, they flowed away together to join the eternal waters.

I gazed at this beautiful scene and at the men and women, who after their bath attired themselves in gay clothes, and embracing, laughing, talking, greeted each other, while the Brahmins came up and tied the rakhi on their wrists. It was the Rakhi Purnima festival of Hindustan.

As I watched the crowd from under the shade of a large banyan tree, some Brahmins came up and, courteously binding rakhis on my wrists, departed. I was a stranger in the land and a Brahmin too.

Suddenly I was aware that a tall old man—a Panjabi—was standing by me. He leaned against the tree, and stood gazing out on the river, but not on the crowds and bathers gathered there; his eyes rested in a dreamy gaze out on the waters beyond the junction of Ganga and Jamuna. There was something in his form and face which roused my interest. His hair was white, but his form erect and noble. He had evidently just risen from his bath, for the sacred thread hanging across his breast was still wet. I noticed there was no rakhi on his wrists, and he seemed to be taking no part in the festival of the day. I wondered at this, and taking a rakhi in my hand, I saluted him respectfully and said, "Maharaj, accept this rakhi."

He turned—on hearing my voice, and I put out my hand to bind the silken thread on his wrist. But he recoiled from me as if stung by a serpent. "Babuji, I thank thee for thy

courtesy," he said in low tones, "but it is thirty years or more since my wrists have felt the silken,—nay, the iron touch of a rakhi." So saying, he turned, and gathering up the folds of his white scarf was about to depart. A sudden curiosity overpowered me and I said in eager tones :

"Thou speakest strangely, Maharaj, and on a day when the little silken rakhi binds all Hindus in a universal chord of brotherhood and good-will."

He answered not awhile, then muttered in low tones, "But not for me. Curse on the rakhi ! Nevermore—."

He had turned again ; but I was curious to hear the tale, for I was sure a strange one lay behind his words. I caught his arm and said eagerly :

"Maharaj, thou hast roused my curiosity, and if it be not harmful tell me more."

He stood silent awhile, then said in gentle tones :

"Wouldst thou hear the tale ? Thou art a stranger, I see, and it will do no harm in telling it thee. Sit thee down, brother, and listen why I wear not the rakhi."

There was a marble seat running round the foot of the tree. We both sat down, and amidst the noise and shouts of the gay crowds, and the splashing of the merry bathers, I listened to his tale :

“ Thirty years or more ago I was a stripling of twenty, a soldier in the service of the Prince of Bijoypur. I was handsome, brave and strong, and of noble descent. I was a great favourite and a personal attendant of the Rajah. In the hunt, in the fight, in travels, in the garden, at home and abroad, I was his constant companion, and almost as a son to him. The old Rajah was sonless. He had an only daughter, the Princess Reba, who was said to have great beauty. I had never beheld her. One day a famous artist, an old Sheikh, came to the Palace and was charged to paint a portrait of the Princess. When it was completed it was brought to my master. He was reading in his rest-house by the lake, an open pavilion of white marble—and I was seated by his side. As the picture was uncovered in the morning sun for the first time my eyes beheld the famed beauty of Reba—my love before and always—beauty which I saw only once in the

living form, surrounded by the flames like a flower in the sun!" His voice trembled and he paused, then continued :

"It was the face of a maiden of sixteen. I gazed in rapt wonder at the marvellous charm—the sweet loveliness of the face—the dark shy eyes, yet brilliant as the purest gems, the spirit of innocence and purity shining forth from them. The face only had been painted, devoid of ornaments, except the soft curls which framed it.

" 'How life-like the picture is! and it is the image of my sweet Reba!' said the Prince in loving admiration and delighted tones. 'Thou shalt be well rewarded for thy work, Sheikhji.'

"The old artist bowed low and salaaming answered :

" 'Thy praise, Maharaj, and the sight of such beauty is ample reward.'

"The picture was then removed. But it remained engraven on my heart. Every line, every feature and expression and the exquisite colouring was imprinted on my memory, and a wild desire to behold the possessor of such loveliness took hold of me. The face rose up before my eyes at all times. It came to me in

my dreams. I loved it, I longed for it, I seemed bewitched by it. I resolved to win her, for was I not of as noble a descent as she? But above all I longed to behold her, and it seemed my hopes were about to be fulfilled soon.

“One morning my master came to me and said :

“‘Son, the Emperor bids me go a long journey. I leave the Queen and Princess in thy charge. She has long wished to visit her sister. Make preparations for them to go during my absence, and do thou accompany them. Be not as a stranger to them, Arjya Singh, but as a son of the house.’ So saying, he took me into the inner apartments of the Palace to a little balcony which overlooked the lake. The Queen alone was seated there and presenting me to her, he said :

“‘Rani, I leave thee and Reba in charge of Arjya Singh. He will escort thee to thy sister’s, and bring thee back after a month, when I hope to join thee.’”

“The Prince then turned to the other side of the Queen, and put up an arm as if laying his hand on someone’s shoulder ; then he smiled and said in loving tones :

“‘Reba, thy heart’s desire shall be fulfilled, and thou shalt see thy cousin Sahana ere long. Art not glad, daughter?’”

“‘Yes, Maharaj,’” came the reply in soft low sweet tones which thrilled through my whole being, as I drank in the sounds.

“‘Bhagwan bring thee back to us safe and well.’” It was the Princess replying to her father. But where was she? I saw no one! I looked again all round and stared with fixed eyes into the space, trying to penetrate the mystery which hid her from my eyes. But the face my heart had treasured so long and my eyes yearned to behold was invisible to me—to me alone! I stood stricken dumb with amazement, gazing with longing eyes at the direction from which her sweet voice had come.

“‘Come, son, we have work of more import in hand,’” said my master, turning to leave the room. I started as from a dream and followed him in silence, bewildered.

“The Rajah departed that night. The next day at noon all was in readiness for the departure of the ladies. With a beating heart I stood by the two richly covered palanquins awaiting the Queen and Princess. When they

came I saw only the Queen followed by a few attendants. She entered one of the palanquins, and then the attendants followed some-one to the other. I knew it was the Princess, but again I saw her not. The curtains were uplifted and soft tones which were music to my ears were heard bidding farewell. For a moment I stood amazed at this insoluble mystery, while my heart throbbed wildly, then I leaped on to my horse, for it was time to begin our journey. After three nights we reached Mohanpur and remained there a month.

“I shall not weary thee, Babuji, by recounting the many occasions on which I was in the presence of the Queen and Her whom my soul yearned to see, but never beheld. She was invisible to me—always invisible ! Only in my dreams did I see the sweet vision which was denied during waking hours to my human eyes. The face of the portrait rose before my eyes at all hours ; the music of her voice was ever in my ears.

“Six months after this, the Princess Reba was wed to a neighbouring Prince. I had hoped to win her, but this strange mystery

drove all such thoughts from my mind. How could I wed one who was invisible to me—who was as a spirit, without form or shape, a phantom of the air? When bidding farewell to all, before her departure from her father's halls, I was taken to her.

“‘Farewell, brother, forget not thy sister,’” she said.

“Only these few words uttered in low gentle tones, and methought her voice trembled. I drank them in, while I stood silent, trembling and speechless. Words! Words only! Nothing more! No sight of my love, my Reba! A rustling of silk, the tinkling of anklets and soft departing footsteps—no more! She was gone! No more would I hear the voice, or feel her sweet presence. For though my eyes were denied a sight of my love, my whole being felt her presence. Bereft of her, my life was without light and hope. A feeling of utter desolation came over me, and I dragged on a weary existence.

“Three years after this, one morning a messenger came riding up to me, and saluting handed me a little sandal-wood casket. It was from the Princess Reba. A letter and a

little yellow silken rakhi lay in it. It was the day of the Rakhi Purnima. With a beating heart I read the few words of the message, bidding me go to her. I took up the soft silken thread reverently, and slipped it on to my wrist. But wonder of wonders ! it seemed to have turned into a knife. It cut into my flesh, burnt through it, it stung me, it pierced me ! Soldier though I was, I groaned aloud with sudden pain. It felt as heavy as lead, like an iron manacle. I looked again but there lay the bright silken bracelet. I tried to pull it off, but I could not. It clung round my wrist like a serpent. I stood, paralysed with astonishment. The messenger's salute of farewell roused me from my bewilderment and I remembered that the Princess had bidden me go to her immediately. Losing not a moment more I mounted my horse and departed. For three nights and three days the rakhi ate into my flesh, maddening me, torturing me ; nor did this cease until—until—but of this anon.

“The Princess Reba's husband had gone to fight the enemy in the South at the command of the Emperor. She was alone in the palace

with her menials and officers. I abode there awaiting the return of the Prince. I was given apartments in the outer palace. Two days later tidings came that the young Prince had died fighting. That same night the funeral pyre was lighted and the Princess Reba entered its flames. From a distance, stunned and grief-stricken, I stood alone watching the heart-rending scene. As the flames curled up I suddenly saw a face—the face of the picture, the face of the love of my youth, my only love, invisible to me all these years! The vivid brightness of the flames had lit up its sweet loveliness with a glorious radiance. There was a happy look on it—she looked like a bride. Death had shown me what life did not. And the rakhi which had all these days cut me, pierced me, stung me, hurt me no more! It lay soft and bright caressing me with its silken touch.

“All was over, only a few ashes left of the body from which the spirit of the Princess Reba had soared away. With bowed heads and cries of ‘Glory to the Sati!’ in low reverent tones, her faithful soldiers left the place and returned to the joyless desolate palace

bereft of its master and mistress.. But I remained motionless, alone in the dark, wondering. It was no dream but a strange reality, and I felt that my life was bound up in some way with the woman whom the cruel flames had just devoured. How long I stood there I know not, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned and saw my Guru standing beside me—tall and erect robed in the ochre coloured clothes of a Sannyasi. I had not seen him for years and knew not where he was.

“‘The mystery of thy life is clear to me, my son,’” he said breaking the stillness of the night. ‘Know thou that in a former birth thou didst love this same Princess Reba, and she sent thee a rakhi in time of danger. As a Rajput and man of honour, thou wert bound to accept the token and its terms, but thy love overcame thy honour and thou didst violate the rules of this pledge. Thou knowest that those who exchange this token may not look upon each other on this earth ; but in a moment of weakness, thou didst approach her, nay, even lay thy hands on her. Thus the curse of the rakhi fell upon thee, and thy Kārma has pursued thee!’

“He paused for a moment, then went on in gentler tones. ‘But thy deed has been atoned for, son Arjya, and perhaps in another life thy soul-mate shall be thine.’ So saying my Guru disappeared into the darkness.”

The old Panjabi had finished his tale and ceased speaking. He remained seated, motionless, his eyes fixed on the water which was steeped in sunshine for it was past noon. He seemed to have forgotten my presence. After a while I arose in silence, and as I looked once more on the old man, I felt somehow that his spirit would soon be free of its earthly prison—free to soar to its love, its mate!

IX. THE GIFT OF A LIFE

UNDER a mango tree, by the banks of the Ganges a Sannyasi sat on the soft green grass, with two youths by his side. He looked a Rishi of old in his yellow loin cloth, his fine features, snowy beard, and matted locks. A small village nestled in a mango grove at a distance ; low green hills rose on one side ; and the river flowed with gentle rippling music before them. In the pale light of the dawn, the scene made a perfect picture of peace and holiness. The sage discoursed thus :

“ Men and beasts, plants and flowers, all things that *are*, are filled with the great Breath of Life. Man alone has a soul, and this life is subject to his soul. In some the light of the soul shines bright and pure, in others it is faint and dimmed. As the light of the lamp is bright or dim according to the oil which nourishes it, even so the soul shines according to the nature and deeds of a man. He whose nature is perfect and whose deeds are true,

whose light shines forth pure and bright, can control the Breath of Life if he wills." The San'yasi ceased, for the shrill lamentation of a woman was heard, piercing the stillness of the dawn. She wandered along the banks moaning and crying. The sage continued :

"Two days ago this woman's child was drowned in this river. Maya ! all is Maya ! (Illusion.) It is the sorrows and joys of this world that delay and obstruct the path of the soul to freedom from its earthly prison, to the attainment of Mukti (Salvation)."

For a while he was silent, and then he went on, as if with the fervour of inspiration : "But even without passing through the gate of death can the immortal soul free itself of its earthly prison. He, whose light is bright and strong, may so will it that the Breath shall pass into another earthly abode, leaving the soul free to wander to its Eternal Abode. Wonder not, my sons. What I say is true and possible. If thou willest with firm mind and unswerving purpose, thy breath will obey thy will, and pass even into a body whose breath is departing. The Breath of Life will enter into another by the power of thy unconquerable

will, and by this great Renunciation thou shalt free thy soul for Mukti. This voluntary passing of the life wave by the will of the soul can give 'Life to Death and Death to Life'." He ceased.

The Sannyasi then rose, and gathering up the deerskin on which he was seated, turned to the youths who were bending low at his feet in salutation. He laid his hands on their heads in blessing, and walked away towards the hills, and was soon lost to sight.

The two youths walked to a tree to which their horses were tied. Unloosening the reins, they mounted on the rich embroidered saddles and rode slowly. The sun had risen, and touched river, hill, and wood with a rosy hue.

One of the riders was tall and dark, with a noble brow and strong well-knit frame. The other, dressed like an Indian Prince, was of slight build, with large dark eyes and a pale thin face, soft and delicate as a girl's. He was Prince Shukumar, the son of the Raja whose territories extended beyond the hills. He had hardly recovered yet from a severe attack of fever that had confined him to his bed for

some months, and had the hectic flush of the consumptive on his face rather than the glow of youth and health. His companion, a soldier in his father's army, was named Pratap, and had been his friend and playmate since childhood. A great love existed between the two lads, and they were more like two brothers.

Philosophy and mystic lore have always a charm for the Indian mind, and the two young men rode on slowly thinking on the mysterious words of the Sannyasi. They neared the village, and reined in their horses in front of a thatched hut on the outskirts of the wood. A neat little garden lay around it, and green creepers almost covered the brown thatch. As they dismounted a young girl came out on the verandah. She appeared to be on the threshold of womanhood; there was a smile in her soft eyes, and a slight blush on her brow. Robed in a simple white muslin *saree*, which clung in graceful folds around her slim form, she looked like a golden lotus bathed in the morning sunlight. Her delicate features had singular softness and charm, and her eyes, deep and dark, betrayed a child's candour and a woman's thought. And the dark coils of her

hair contrasted well with her bright fair complexion.

Mohini—for that was her name—spread a mat on the clean floor, and the young men seated themselves on it. Mohini's mother, clad in the plain white cloth of a Hindu widow, entered, and the young men touched her feet in greeting, as is the custom in the East. "Let me bring thee a cup of hot milk, Prince Shukumar," said the widow, "and one for Pratap too, for ye need refreshment after your long ride." So saying she left them, and soon returned with some milk, which both the young men accepted with thanks. After a while they rose, and the Prince said: "Mother bid me ask you to come to her this evening, aunt." "I will come," said the lady. "Will you come too, Mohini?" "Yes," answered the girl softly, as a faint blush overspread her face. The young men then took leave of the mother and daughter and departed.

The next morning Pratap wended his way to Mohini's cottage with a book in his hand. Mohini's mother met him at the door and said:

"Thou hast come just in time, Pratap. I want thy advice." "What is it, aunt?"

(Pratap and Shukumar were both wont to call her aunt since childhood.) "It is about Mohini," she replied. "People talk and blame me that a grown-up girl like her should yet remain unwed. A Hindu girl must be wed and it is my duty to delay no longer."

Mohini wedded! Pratap seemed stunned for a moment at the very thought. He only knew the girl was his light and all that made life beautiful and sweet. A great hope filled his heart. He had seen the girl day after day blossoming into sweet pure womanhood, and the time for the fulfilment of his hopes seemed to have come. "I shall return directly, aunt, and talk it over." So saying, with a beating heart he walked away in search of Mohini. As he came near the well under a large tree, he heard voices. He was behind the trunk and invisible. It was Mohini's voice, soft and low as the south wind. "No, Usha, I shall never marry." Usha was a girl of the village, Mohini's friend and companion. "Why not, Mohini?" "I have no secrets from you, Usha. He whom I love is not for this world's love and happiness." "Tell me why ye cannot wed." "Because

death claims him as her bridegroom, and no earthly bride may be his." For a while Usha was silent, and then in a low sad voice she asked,

"Is it Prince Shukumar?"

"Yes," was the only reply.

"But why may not you wed him? Savitri wedded her lord, knowing he was fated to die. You are as beautiful as any Princess, and of the same caste."

"No, Usha, that is a dream not to be fulfilled in this life. He is a Prince, and I—" Mohini's voice trembled and she was silent.

"Mohini, it breaks my heart to see tears in your eyes. Oh, why do you love one who is for the gods?"

"I am content and proud to love him only, and though he may be gone from us in a year, I shall live in the memory of him till I die."

"How can that be Mohini? You know a Hindu girl may not remain unwed all her life."

"But you know too, Usha, that it would be a sin for a Hindu girl to love one and wed another."

A silence fell between the two girls. Pratap, who had stood rooted to the spot, turned back.

"I might have known; who can see and know Shukumar and not love him?" he thought. "But Mohini's and his happiness is mine."

He returned with slow steps to the cottage, and going to Mohini's mother said: "Aunt, what do you say to Shukumar for Mohini's bridegroom?" "Shukumar! he is a Prince, and we are poor. But though my child is beautiful as Lakshmi and worthy of a Prince, knowest thou not, my son, that he is very ill, and perhaps next summer may be gone from us?" "But aunt, physicians are more hopeful and he may yet recover; he is young," answered Pratap.

Just then Mohini came in from the garden. Pratap noted with pain the sadness and quiet despair in her eyes. "Here is a book, Mohini, I have brought for you. It is the Bengalee of Shakuntala," he said, putting it into her hands. The girl's eyes brightened as she took it from him. She was one of the few who had been taught to read and write, and loved it. She took it from him and said, "How good of you to get it for me, Pratap. You promised to bring me the story of Savitri. I long to read it."

"Yes, I will; another day." So saying Pratap took leave of them.

* * *

By the end of the rains Shukumar was worse.

His end was not far off. The only son of the old Raja lay dying. The old man would have given all his territories for the young life ebbing away.

One evening as he lay with his hands clasped in Pratap's, he called softly, "Pratap!" Pratap came nearer. "Pratap, the end is very near. I do not dread it, but mourn only for my parents. Be as a son to them, as you have been a brother to me. There is one other wish of mine, Pratap. Wed Mohini." A look of great love and longing came into his large dark eyes. "Pratap, I dreamt a dream of great happiness once, but cast it out of my heart long ago. She may not be mine, but I shall be happy to know before I die that she will be yours." Pratap tried to speak but could not. His heart was breaking within him.

Three days after this all hope was given up. The shadow of death had fallen on the royal

home, and all awaited its approach in silence. The mother, pale with watching, nursed her only son with tearless eyes in silence. Shukumar no longer spoke, nor saw, but lay unconscious. As Pratap sat and looked his last on the dear comrade he had loved since childhood, and the thought of Mohini's sad sweet face rose before him, he cried out in agony, "Oh, why does death come to those who are loved and not to one like me who has none to mourn him." Then, as if in a dream, he beheld the tall form of the Sannyasi standing in the dark shadows of the room, and words, which he had heard before, reached his ears again.

"If thou willest with a firm mind and unswerving purpose thy breath will obey thy will and pass even into a body whose breath is departing for ever."

Pratap rose silently and left the palace. He walked on till the village was left behind, and the low hills and the flowing Ganga came into sight. He stopped under a large mango tree on its banks. Then he seated himself on the soft green grass leaning against its trunk. He murmured in low earnest tones, "O Guru,

come thou to my aid!" Then with folded arms and closed eyes, he sat silent and still like a Rishi Kumar of old. The moon waned, and the dawn came, and still Pratap remained motionless under the tree.

Prince Shukumar lay cold and seemingly lifeless on his bed. With a heart-rending cry of "Where art thou gone, my treasure!" his mother flung herself beside him in an agony of grief, and clasped him to her breast. When they took the cold form from the unconscious mother, a deep breath, like a sigh, came from the lips of the Prince. His body quivered and shook, and he opened his eyes. He whom they thought dead, was alive! Could joy be greater than this!

But where was Pratap in this hour of gladness and hope? Shukumar looked around for him but saw him not.

At last they went to seek him, and found him seated under the tree. The sun, like a young god, had leaped into the sky to greet the world. Its rays fell in a golden shower on his calm face and noble brow, and on his erect motionless form. He looked like a young Rishi lost in meditation. They called

to him, but he answered not. They touched him, and his cold lifeless form fell silently to the ground.

He had given up the great breath of life as a gift to his loved friend. He had attained Mukti! He had given "Life to Death and Death to Life!"

X. PRINCE GOHA¹

LIKE a bird's tiny nest, safe and high up on the spreading banyan tree, lay the white marble palace of CHANDRABATI on the brow of the great VINDHACHAL hills. Before setting out to battle, Raja SILADITYA, king of BALLABHPUR, had sent his beloved Queen PUSHPAVATI to her father the Raja of CHANDRABATI. The hope of a son and heir soon to be fulfilled kindled the hearts of the Royal pair as they parted. As SILADITYA prepared for battle the thought of the peaceful days he would spend after it in the palace of CHANDRABATI filled his heart with a new gladness and gave him fresh courage. But alas, Fate had ruled otherwise. A poisoned arrow from the infidel enemy pierced the heart of the young king putting an end to his hopes and his life for ever.

¹ A Tale of Rajasthan, adapted from *The Bengali* of Abanindra Nath Tagore.

Rani PUSHPAVATI sat alone in the marble palace and awaited the coming of her royal consort. Her chamber overlooked a steep precipice and a part of the road leading to BALLABHPUR. A white marble balcony jutted out into space over it. There she sat embroidering for her lord, a scarf of silver gauze light as a feather, bright as a star.

With a golden needle she broidered the picture of the Sun-God on his chariot of gold. She longed for the moment when the King would return to her victorious and with his turban, her beautiful gift, wound round his brow, he would sit beside her and tell her tales of the battle-field, on this white balcony which was like a piece of white cloud on the hill-side. The road to BALLABHPUR went winding along from the foot of the hill. Sometimes a spear could be seen flashing like a point of fire in the rays of the setting sun on the road and a rider on a black horse would come galloping swiftly to the lion's gate of the palace, then with lowered spear and bended head he would deliver a letter to the queen and retire. With a joyous heart PUSHPAVATI would sit with the letter in her hand, gazing at the blue sky and

green hills, dreaming the day away in happiness, and that day those who came near the queen would have a present from her. The next morning the rider would depart with the queen's reply, riding swiftly away, his shield and spear shining like burnished gold in the sun-light.

When from the temple of BHABANI the evening hymn pealed forth amidst the clash of bells, PUSHPAVATI, with the letter hidden in her knot of raven hair, would go to the temple in her red Sari and pray for her lord's safe return.

The day Raja SILADITYA gave his life on the battle-field, PUSHPAVATI sat embroidering the beautiful scarf. She took up a golden thread, finer than her silken hair and brighter than a flame of fire, and as she threaded the golden needle it pierced her finger which was like the CHAMPA flower. Tears came to her lovely eyes, and she saw a drop of blood like a little ruby on the delicate cloth. She tried to wash it out with water, but like a flower which sheds its fragrance all around, the drop of blood spread all over and coloured the gauze scarf a rosy tint.

As Rani PUSHPAVATI gazed at the stained cloth a new fear entered her heart and with tears in her eyes she said to her mother:

"Oh, mother, bid me farewell, and let me go to BALLABHPUR, for my heart trembles and I fear some danger has befallen my lord."

The Queen Mother replied, "Stay a while, daughter, and let thy son be born." But PUSHPAVATI stayed not, and with an escort of eighty brave Rajput soldiers set out for BALLABHPUR. A desert lay between the towns of CHANDRABATI and BALLABHPUR. When the queen reached the little town of Birnagar by the desert, she heard that her lord was no more, and that the beautiful town of BALLABHPUR was desolated and destroyed. PUSHPAVATI shed not a tear, spake not a word, but her heart was like the sandy desert stretched before her, dry and silent and lone. In silence she cast off her precious jewels and flung them on to the sands in a glittering mass. She wiped the red SINDUR (vermilion), the symbol of her happy wifehood from off her forehead, and putting on a widow's cloth, took refuge in a large cave in the Malia hills at the foot of which lay the desert.

At the appointed time in the dark Guha (cave) a son was born to her and he was named Goha. Then Pushpavati sent for the friend and companion of her childhood, a Brahmin's daughter named Kamalavati who lived in Birnagar. In the presence of the eighty faithful Rajputs, she put the babe into her arms and said: "Sister, I give my little Goha into thy keeping. Rear him like a son and when I am dead take a handful of ashes from my funeral pyre and cast it into the Ganges which flows by the holy city of Benares so that I may be saved from widowhood in the life to come."

With tears streaming from her eyes Kamalavati received the infant prince into her loving arms.

That evening the eighty faithful Rajputs piled a pyre of sandal wood on the Malia hill and stood around it in reverent silence. With the light of hope in her eyes and a smile on her lovely face, the young queen entered the flames and ere long only ashes remained of the beautiful Pushpavati. Then with one voice the Rajput soldiers cried out "Glory to our Queen, glory to the Sati."

With a handful of the Sati's ashes in one hand and the babe in another Kamalavati returned to her home. The eighty Rajputs followed her and settled in Birnagar near their prince, entrusted to their care, living only for him.

Thus Prince Goha grew up in the home of Kamalavati, the Brahmin woman. She tried to teach him to read and write like the Brahmin lads, but Goha loved more to roam with the Bhil youths from hill to hill or to ride with the Rajputs hunting the lion in the desert or the deer in the forests.

In the quiet little town of Birnagar at the foot of the Malia hills, dwelt the peaceful holy Brahmins. In the dark forests of the hills, where the waterfall thundered and splashed along, and wondrous flowers and ferns bloomed, where the tiger roared and the deer roamed and the snake hissed, lived Magulik, the King of the Bhils. Black-skinned like the snake, with the strength of the tiger and the heart of the lion, he ruled over the simple, child-like, truth-loving Bhils. The sonless old chief loved the noble young Rajput as a son, and unlike other Rajputs Goha despised not the

black Bhils but deemed himself as one of them. One day the Bhil youths clothed in tiger-skins gathered round Prince Goha, who had ridden to the Bhil territories to see his friends. They cried out in merry sport, "Our new king has come, our King has come". Thus they went about singing and beating drums with their play-king from hill to hill till at last they neared the old Bhil Raja's thatched palace. Magulik, hearing them, came out and said: "Where is your new king, lads?" They pointed to Goha. The old man's eyes rested long and lovingly on the fair open countenance of the Rajput princeling. At last he said, "You have said well. I have no son and Goha shall be your king."

A Bhil youth then cut his thumb and with his blood drew the raj-tilak (the mark of royalty) on the prince's forehead, thus setting the eternal seal of Bhil royalty on his brow with the blood of a Bhil. Goha then went and sat on the heir's seat so long empty at the foot of the Bhil Raja's throne. The heart of the lonely old man was filled with joy and hope, but this happiness was not to last.

'Ten years ago Magulik and his youngest brother had quarrelled, and the boy had parted in anger and bitterness and had never been seen since. On the day Prince Goha was made heir to the Bhil throne, the younger brother suddenly returned. Going up to the old king he said in bitter angry tones, "What hast thou done, brother? Thou hast no son, and after thee I am king, but thou hast put a stranger and a Rajput on the throne of the Bhils. What means this?"

Magulik, who had never heard of nor seen his brother these ten years, cried out, "Calm thee, brother." But the young Bhil prince strode away in anger, exclaiming, "I shall be calm only when I am revenged," and left the palace. Pondering sadly, the old Bhil Raja said to himself, "The raj-tilak has been drawn on Goha's brow and no human hand may wipe it out. He has been as a son to me. He is a good and noble lad and he shall be king." Then he seated himself on his wooden throne and taking the Prince on his lap called together all the old Bhil chiefs and made each of them swear with his hand on Goha's head that he would stand by him always in danger of trouble,

in joy or sorrow and that Goha's enemies would be theirs. After great rejoicings the assemblage broke up. At night Magulik went to the Prince and said, "Give me thy dagger, Goha, so that with it I may kill thy enemy." Goha took out his dagger, with his name engraved on it, from his belt, and handed it to the old Raja.

Then Magulik with Goha's dagger in his hand went out into the dark night to seek his brother. He found him at last in a little hut, lying face downward on the mud floor, like a common Bhil. At sight of his only brother lying there in his youth and loneliness, the heart of the simple old Bhil smote him, and all bitterness and anger left it. The memory of the happy days of their childhood, of their loving mother, rushed upon him. He flung aside Goha's dagger, and kneeling by called softly, "Bhaya". Three times he repeated softly the dear name after ten years but no reply came. Then bending low he stroked the curly black hair of the lad and said in sad low tones, "Art angry, Bhaya, with thy old brother for denying thee? Why didst thou leave me these ten years, lad? If thou

hadst been near, my hungry lone old heart would not have turned to Goha the noble young Rajput. He has been as a son to me. But half of the Himalayas are mine and thou shalt be king of those territories. Awake, brother, and forgive thy old brother. Art angry still with the old man, who after taking thy birthright has come to kill thee? Then take this dagger, Bhaya, and plunge it into this cruel heart."

Picking up Goha's dagger he thrust it into the silent Bhil lad's hands, but it fell from the stiff motionless fingers on to the floor. Then Magulik felt the cold body and knew his only brother was no more.

A great sorrow filled his heart. Blind with grief and pain he thought with a bitter heart of Prince Goha on the throne which should have been his brother's lying dead and still there. An unreasoning anger filled his mind and he thought to himself, "But for Goha, my brother's heart would not have broken and his young life gone for ever."

He stroked the cold black breast, then rose, and with the dagger in his hand left the hut and went out. With feeble steps and a

breaking heart the old Bhil wended his way on the Malia hills. Some Bhil girls returning from the palace festivities passed by and one of them exclaimed, "Sister, didst thou see how handsome our new Prince looked as he danced to-night. Ah, he will make a noble king indeed." And Magulik hearing thought, "Already the Bhils cast me off like a worn out garment," and he felt lonely and miserable. It seemed there was none in the world to love him. Again two Rajputs came riding along and one said to the other, "Why did not Goha sit on the throne but at the foot of it?" His companion answered, "Knowest thou not that Goha has resolved to sit at the old king's feet so long as he is alive?"

A great gladness flooded the heart of the lone old man and he exclaimed in joy, "Bless thee, Goha, for thy loving noble heart."

Suddenly he heard a deep sigh behind him and wondering turned to find his brother's great black hunting dog standing by him. The wound still fresh in his heart bled again and tears blinded his eyes. Spent with grief the old Bhil stumbled on a rock. He fell heavily

face forwards, and Goha's dagger held firmly in his hand pierced his breast and went through his falling body.

In the stillness of the dark night the jackals cried out, "Hai, hai, hai, hai," and the cry was echoed from every hill.

Next morning a Rajput rider passing that way saw the dead body of Magulik, the Bhil Raja, and Prince Goha's dagger plunged into his heart.

In anger and wonder he drew it out and went with it to Goha and said, "What hast thou done, Juvaraj (prince)? How couldst thou murder the old Raja who has been a father to thee, and who has made thee King?"

But Goha not knowing anything was angered, and he commanded the Rajput to be put to death.

Then taking the blood-stained dagger, he stuck it into his belt with one hand and wiping the tears which streamed from his eyes with the other, he sat on the Bhil throne.

Thus Prince Goha, son of Siladitya, descended from the royal Solar line of Aryan kings, became the king and ruler of the black Bhils.

XI. HARACHAND RAJA-KI-PURIE¹

A MAN of noble bearing stood in the presence of the Hindu King of Hindustan in his private audience chamber. A scroll was in his hand, and having bowed low, he stood silent. The Emperor returned his salute and asked :

“Is the design ready, Sir Architect?”

“Yes, Sire,” said the foreigner, for such he seemed, and handed the scroll to the King.

¹ Recorded in an old manuscript found in the Temple of Biratpur. The name of Harachand Raja-ki-purie is one given to the mirage of the Indian desert by the common folk.

“Whoever has the desire to see the grandest phenomena in nature let him repair to the plains of Mairta or Hissar and watch, before the sun rises, the fairy palace of Harachanda, infinitely grander and more imposing than a sunrise on the Alpine Helvetia, which alone may compete with the Chittram of the Desert.”—TOD’S RAJASTHAN.

One version of the many stories about Raja Harachand, or Harish Chandra of the Surjya line of Kings, an ancestor of Rama, is that on account of his great virtues he ascended bodily into Heaven, but descended again and remained in mid air. His fall is attributed to his pride in relating his own good deeds on entering Heaven.

His Majesty took it and, unfolding the rolls, gazed at it intently in silence for a while. A look of wonder and delight passed over his fine features and half rising from his seat exclaimed :

“It is marvellous ! Where got you this design, Sir ?”

“The creations of man—poet, artist, musician or sculptor—are all inspired, Sire, but I beheld with my own eyes such a palace—only more beautiful, more marvellous. It was not of human workmanship.”

“It is magnificent ; but thou speakest strangely, Sir Architect.”

“Yes, Sire, for it is a strange tale, and if thou permit me I shall tell it thee.”

“I would hear it. Be seated, Sir,” commanded the King pointing to a low seat, “and tell it me now, for this morning I am free from the cares of work and can give thee an hour or so.”

Bowing low the Architect obeyed, and facing the King began his tale :

“I knew not kith nor kin, and some marking my light-coloured hair and eyes said I was a foreigner. But my father was a Hindu, so I

was told by the old Rajput who reared me from childhood. In my youth I had a passion for learning and the fine arts and in a few years had the reputation of a scholar. I was accomplished, too, in Music and Art. It was at this time that Prince Harish Chandra of the Surjya line of Kings engaged me as his tutor and companion. We travelled in many distant countries over land and sea. After five years spent thus, news came of the death of his old uncle who was on the throne, and the Prince who was the next heir was called to take up the government of his State. We were then in Persia and on receiving the news turned ourselves homewards. The Prince was then a young man, handsome and brave, generous and noble, extremely fond of study. The Prince's territories lay beyond the plain of Mairta near the Aravalli Mountains." Here the King exclaimed in a tone of interest :

"Dost thou speak of the Mad Prince of Biratpur?"

"Yea, your Majesty, and this tale will explain the history of his madness as well as the mystery of the design before thee," answered the Architect, and then resumed his tale.

“When we crossed the river Sutlej and came to the borders of the great Indian Desert we found a cavalcade of horses and camels and men with provisions and tents awaiting our coming in order to escort us across the Desert. They were the loyal subjects of the Prince brought hither by this faithful old Dewan, Dharam Singh. Saluting and greeting him as their liege lord they awaited his commands. The shadows of evening were fast falling on the city of S——where we had halted and it was resolved that we should begin our journey across the desert at dawn. We pitched our tents therefore under the shade of some trees.

“The Prince who had left his country some years ago was eager to know all the tidings, so he and the old Dewan talked far into the night. At morn we got ready for our journey and were soon moving. The city of S——was left far behind and only the vast expanse of the desert looking like a calm white sea in the pale light of the rising sun met our eyes. The oases became less frequent and only a few bushes here and there or a stunted tree could be seen.

“ At dusk, hot and weary, we halted at an oasis where there was a collection of huts and after partaking of food rested for the night. Thus we journeyed for days and days and sometimes before the break of dawn a floating mirage, transient but lovely, met our gaze. Embattled towers, lakes and shady groves, lofty palaces and temples lay suspended on the horizon till the ‘sun in his might’ dispersed the vision. It underwent a thousand transformations and we halted often to gaze in rapt wonder at this marvel of nature. To the Prince who had left his country when quite a lad this ‘Chittram of the Marusthali’ seemed to have a great fascination.

“ At last we came to the plains of Mairta and their being no oasis in sight we decided to spend the night under a group of bare stunted trees. Huge masses of sand-clouds ever moving could be seen and in the distance looked like waves of the sea. Soon darkness settled on the silence and solitude of the desert. After midnight the shrill cry of a bird awoke us all. The moon was setting and the night not spent yet. As we all arose and came out a beautiful mirage burst on our view. At first

it seemed to be veiled in mist; slowly it became transparent; and then as if touched by the enchanter's wand it was revealed to us in its full beauty. 'Ah! how beautiful,' exclaimed the men. 'It is Harachand Raja-Ki-Purie, his city and palace floating in mid air!' It was beautiful indeed!

"A palace of white marble glittered in the lingering rays of the silver moonlight. The architecture seemed stupendous, grand and such as we had never seen before or since. A town with towers and temples lay beyond, while a beautiful lake encircled by shady trees seemed to lie before it.

"Motionless and silent I stood and gazed enchanted at this lovely vision, when an exclamation from the Prince made me turn away my eyes from it, and I looked at him.

"An earnest startled look was in his eyes which were fixed on the mirage. He stood as if spell-bound, and then with a sudden movement turned from us, leaped on to his horse, and rode across the sands towards it.

"'Maharaj, Maharaj,' I called, 'where goest thou alone—it is the chittram of the desert, a vision of the air!'

“ But he seemed not to hear and rode on more swiftly, while I followed on my horse, shouting and calling. All our men stood in silent astonishment while Dharam Singh gesticulated wildly. Signing to them to wait there I rode on, following the Prince. Our horses seemed to have gained supernatural powers and moved on the heavy sands with the same speed as on the plains ! The mirage, instead of receding from us as I had expected it to, seemed to have come nearer, and we soon came close to the lake on the other side of which was the palace. A broad path ran along its banks towards it. The Prince had not once turned his head, nor did he seem to be aware of my presence. He seemed impelled by some irresistible power. As we came to the margin of the lake my horse came to a standstill and refused to go any further. Some unknown power seemed to force me back too and I rode back slowly a few steps and, dismounting, tied my horse to a tree, resolving to spend the night there and see what happened. I was too bewildered to think calmly, and resting against the tree watched the Prince disappearing under a magnificent sculptured

gateway, Fatigued with the heat and long journey of the day I lay down while a cool breeze wafted from over the lake fanned me. No human being was in sight ; no sound was heard ; all was silent as death ; and soon an overpowering drowsiness came over me and I fell asleep.

“ Suddenly I awoke. The noise of men and women, music and rejoicing, shouts and cries reached my ears and, wonder of wonders, the palace was a blaze of light ! Garlands of lamps hung on the trees, from the arches and gateways, and shone from doors and windows. It was a scene from fairyland. The spot where I rested was deserted. Brilliantly lighted boats decked with flowers glided about on the surface of the lake. Men and women gaily dressed were on it. The Prince was nowhere to be seen. A boat glided by and a man of noble bearing richly attired exclaimed in Sanskrit :

“ ‘ Truly our Princess has won a noble bridegroom. Long live Prince Harish Chandra ! ’

“ I sat bewildered and amazed wondering at these strange words, staring at the mysterious scene before me in silence. Soon the first blush of Dawn overspread the sky ; a grey

mist seemed to enshroud the palace and its surroundings; and as the sun appeared in the sky in its youth and glory, the whole scene shimmered and quivered and then vanished! From the fast disappearing mist Prince Harish Chandra came galloping forth on his horse and halted near me. Dismounting slowly he fell in a heavy swoon on to the ground. Only the wide expanse of the desert meeting the blue vault of heaven on all sides was around us! I raised the Prince's head on to my knee and looked on his face. Suddenly a beautiful ring on his finger arrested my eye. A large and brilliant diamond such as I have never seen flashed and glittered like a star. More amazed than ever I drew it off gently and put into my vest. Thus I sat for some time when I saw our little cavalcade approaching us. They came near and Dharam Singh questioned me in low tones. I told them that the young Prince, fascinated and lured by the vision, had ridden towards it like many a traveller and had at last lain down exhausted. I deemed it prudent to be silent about our strange adventure. When the sun was high in the heavens the Prince awoke and sat up. His

face was pale. He gazed around in a dazed way and passed his hand over his eyes. Then turning to me he said in low tones, 'Friend, I had a strange dream last night.'

" 'Dreams are always strange for they come from another world,' I replied. 'Come, Prince, it is time to begin our journey; it is late.'

" Without a word he arose, dressed and ate, and we resumed our journey. The Prince was singularly silent all day, a thoughtful dreamy look on his face, and at times he gazed around in a dazed manner. Towards evening the city of Biratpur could be seen in the distance for we were now in the Prince's domains. At night we halted at an oasis and pitched our tents. I lay awake, however, wondering at the strange experience of the previous night. Had not the ring been in my vest I would have thought it all a dream.

" After midnight the Prince started up from his sleep, exclaiming, 'I come! I come!' and rising at once mounted his horse and rode forth. I rose too, and on coming out was amazed to see the same beautiful palace at some distance from us. We soon reached the same lake, but to-night I rode on without

any impediment. The Prince alighted near a pillar and tied his horse. I did the same. The palace was deserted and silent that night but brilliantly illuminated. From courtyard to garden, through halls and corridors, balconies and chambers, the Prince wandered, I following.

“I gazed enraptured at the elaborately sculptured marvellous designs and at the diversified architecture of the structure. I marvelled at the stones, each one carved delicately and laid skilfully. I looked in awe and wonder at its majesty and grandeur and its simplicity and loveliness. The walls were inlaid with beautiful stones of all colours and gems and pearls, in exquisitely intricate designs. It was all engraved on my memory never to be effaced. The skill of the *Shilpi*¹ could go no further ! Being an artist myself and a true lover of Art, I forgot the Prince and everything in my rapt admiration, till I was startled by the sound of a voice speaking. I saw the Prince standing on a balcony near by with a lovely maiden by his side. Lovely beyond human dreams,—with a beauty and sweetness such as enthrall the

¹ *Shilpi*—architect or workman.

hearts of men, and make all who behold long for it. A face from which the pure soul shone forth. She was speaking in the Sanskrit language, her voice heavenly in its sweetness.

“ ‘This is the palace of thy fathers, Prince, and I come a bride as I have done since all age ; but we part to-night for ever ! Thus have we met and loved only to part again and again, since thousands of years. For it is written in the Book of Fate that our meeting shall be brief and transient like a flash of lightning, and then we shall part to meet and love again in another life, only to be severed and lost again in a great yearning such as True and Pure Love alone knows. Thus it will be from life to life till by the greatness of our love and the yearning of our hearts our twin souls shall be one ! ’

“ She ceased, her voice dying away like the vibrations of music. Then the Prince answered, ‘ I mind not to be freed from this mortal frame if each life has *thee* for my love, beloved.’

“ Farewell, my lord ; I may not stay longer, she said. The Prince held out his arms as if to clasp her, but at that instant the lights went

out, a mist hid them from my eyes—and all vanished! The sun had risen on the boundless desert and the Prince lay near me in a heavy swoon.

“Our companions were advancing towards us. The Prince slept till noon. Then he awoke, and without so much as looking at us rose, and mounting his horse turned its head in the opposite direction to our route and rode forth.

“‘Whither dost thou ride alone, Prince?’ I asked, following quickly.

“‘To seek my bride!’ he replied, and spurred his steed on. We all followed. Silently the Prince rode through the desert, wandering in all directions till at dusk, hot and weary, he turned to us, asked for food, ate, and lay down to sleep.

“By the light in his eyes I knew that Reason had left him and that *he had gone mad!*”

“‘The evil spirit of the Marusthali has driven the Prince mad,’ said our men.”

The Architect paused in his tale, and in a voice which shook with emotion exclaimed:

“Ah, my poor Prince, to be thus bereft of reason in thy youth and strength—while a

throne and loyal subjects awaited to welcome thee! Life, thou art ever a mystery to man!" He then continued—

"For days and days he roved about thus till Hunger, which is the greatest of all desires in the human frame—aye, greater even than love and hate, sorrow and joy, overpowered him, and sleep, kind nurse of man, took him to her breast.

"At last thus wandering he reached his own capital, but it was naught to him. Five years have passed since and still the Prince wanders about unceasingly, aimlessly, sometimes in silence, sometimes muttering in low tones. The throne lies vacant, for his sister, the next of kin, is but a child. His sorrowing subjects have always a guard of men equipped with tents and provisions who follow him about in his aimless wanderings. May the God of his fathers release the weary spirit from its wandering frame!"

The Architect paused awhile, then said: "This, Sire, is my tale. I have tried to reproduce as faithfully as I can the magnificent structure I saw and entered in the desert of Rajasthan. Thou knowest now that it is not of mortal thought."

“Thy story is strange indeed, Sir Architect,” said the King, “but I believe thee. No *human* architect could have planned it. Yet *human* hands shall erect this fairy palace and neither money nor labour shall be withheld,” said the Hindu King, rising in his enthusiasm. “When years go by and generation after generation rule this land it will stand erect in its beauty and grandeur and men of all nations will gaze and wonder !”

* * * *

The magnificent edifice still stands erect and noble, defying Time, marvellous in the beauty of its design, wonderful in the skill displayed in its structure, having a simplicity, chasteness and grandeur combined, such as no other land possesses.

There was no chronicle left to tell men of the *Shilpi*—the master mind which designed and carried it out. Men of all nations come to this land of a mysterious unknown past, to gaze and wonder at it. And now after ages has the mystery been revealed !

